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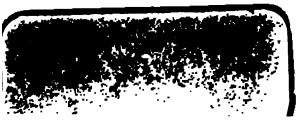

Margaret Warner;

OR,

THE YOUNG WIFE AT THE FARM.

"A soft green lawn, interspersed with flower-beds and one or two feathering trees, sloped down from the south side of the house to a clear shallow pond."—*Page* 13.

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THE YOUNG WIFE AT THE FARM.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "NURSERY INFLUENCE."

SEELEY, JACKSON, & HALLIDAY, 54, FLEET STREET.
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CHAPTER I.

"FAIR Bride! the die is cast, and thou must stand
The utmost hazard: never may the heart
That now is pledged, together with thy hand,
Repent the love it trusted. May thy part
Through all life's future scenes be bright as now,
Nor deeper shades of care veil that unwrinkled brow!"

"They that enter into a state of marriage cast a die of the greatest contingency, and of the greatest interest in the world, next to the last throw for eternity."

MARGARET WARNER;

OR,

The Young Wife at the Farm.

CHAPTER I.

FARMER WARNER had just married a young wife, and great was the curiosity, and many the surmises that passed from mouth to mouth, amongst the neighbours as to what she would be like, how she would dress; whether she were pretty or plain—proud or pleasant. The fact was, that young Mr. Warner had taken a position in the neighbourhood of Ellaston as one of the sharpest, cleverest, and most enterprising farmers who had ever settled in that part of Herefordshire. He was consulted and looked up to by men much older than himself, and had been ardently admired and sought after by

mothers who wished to see their daughters well settled in life. Consequently his marriage was an unwelcome piece of news to them, and furnished materials for much speculation and gossip, both good-natured and ill-natured.

Meanwhile the object of all this curiosity had just driven up to his own home after a three weeks' absence, having Mrs. Warner by his side. He jumped out of the dog-cart, gave the reins to a man who by turns filled the offices of gardener and groom, and hastened to help out his wife and introduce her to the interior of Colwall Manor Farm.

Before they mounted the old-fashioned steps that led up to the front door, Mrs. Warner turned round; she had an intuitive feeling that Caleb, the groom, had been watching her all the time; so she nodded kindly to him with a timid smile, while Mr. Warner seemed to be suddenly reminded of a courtesy which he seldom forgot, and spoke a few good-natured words to his servant.

Caleb appeared somewhat bewildered, and occasionally pulled a piece of his shaggy forelock in token of acknowledgment; but when the couple were fairly out of sight inside the house, he gradually recovered his presence of mind sufficiently to utter, in a dull under tone:

"Well, to be sure!"

The words were few, but they meant a great deal; and some of the under-current of thoughts whence they proceeded oozed out to his faithful wife, Martha, while he was sitting, a few hours later, in the little cottage hard by.

Of course, old Caleb occupied rather an important position that evening; for, as the thirst for gossip is by no means confined to the higher and middle classes, the wives and daughters of Mr. Warner's workmen were eagerly looking for some report of the "young lady who was coming to the Farm." No one had caught a glimpse of her but Caleb, and he was therefore waylaid as he crossed the meadow to his cottage by one of the greatest gossips in Oakswood, who hoped she might achieve (what no one else had ever done) the extraction of news from Caleb.

He guessed her intention, and held doggedly on his way, having no desire to satisfy idle curiosity. "Good evening, Master Wilks," she said, as an opening to the conversation; "and where be you a going?"

"Home," answered Caleb.

"And what makes you so late?"

"I've only just done work."

"There, now, Master Wilks, don't you be offended, but did you see Farmer Warner's lady?"

Caleb winced. His wits were slow, and this question was a direct one. So he hurried on, with the woman beside him.

"I say, Master, did you see her?"

"What's that to you?"

"Well, nothing particular, exactly; only of course we all wants to know about her."

This was not a question, so there was no need to answer.

"I've heard as how people say she comes from Birmingham; that her father was a retired tradesman, and that she's very strait in her notions; she's a deal younger than he, they say, too, and ai'nt fit to be a farmer's wife, neither, not having been bred up well enough."

These remarks only increased Caleb's pace, and he shook off his tormentor at the stile which divided his garden from the field.

She bade him a sulky good evening, and shuffled off, disappointed.

But the gruff old man relaxed at the sight of his bright blazing hearth, with the clean pewter plates on the dresser, and the large oaken chair placed ready for him by as good a wife as ever blessed the cottage of a poor man. There sat Martha beside the little deal table at the window, busily mending a tattered shirt. She was not old, and looked far younger than many a woman of forty-five. Her hair, half grey,

half brown, was neatly brushed back beneath her white cap, and the dark print gown fitted closely to her figure.

She looked up with a cheerful word of welcome as her husband entered, and did not, like her indiscreet neighbour, begin at once to ask him questions. She first of all got his evening meal ready, and, when he had fairly embarked on it, she sat down to finish her work in the fast-failing twilight.

Caleb was armed with a large pocket-knife in one hand, and a hunch of bread in the other; while a huge piece of bread and cheese already cut off was forming an excrescence in his cheek, when he began—

"Well, missus, and I suppose you are somewhat inquisitive, like the rest of them. Maybe you'd care to know what I thought of the young woman."

"Yes, to be sure I should, Caleb."

He swallowed the mouthful, and chuckled while he said, emphatically,

"If I'm not mistaken, wife, she's one of the right sort; there's no trying at giving herself airs, or being a fine lady; and she looked as neat and quiet as you do; not dressed up in every colour of the rainbow, as Mr. Carter Smith's lady."

"Never mind Mrs. Smith, Caleb," said Martha, parenthetically.

"Well, any how, I think she's one of the right [illegible]" was Caleb's repeated verdict on Mrs. Warner;

and he clapped his hand decidedly on his knee once or twice.

"It 'll make a change in the place, having a lady at the farm, and a good change too," said Martha. "It's eight years, come Michaelmas, as master's mother died on the Thursday before, and we've had no lady there since. Well, I only hope Mrs. Warner can put up with the simple folk here. But people as comes from other parts say we're rather dark and ignorant, and haven't the learning others have. I think, myself, there's a deal of roughness amongst us; but the hearts may be as good for all that."

"Don't talk to me about the learning, wife, I don't hold to it a bit; folks here is bad enough, but my idea is, learning would only make them worse—a deal worse. I never saw any good come of it; and what's the use of teaching all manner of fine things to people as works at the plough or in the garden from morning to night? Why, 'tis so much time and trouble thrown clean away. No, no; I don't hold to these 'ere new-fangled notions."

"Perhaps if we were taught more we should do better; and as for me, I should be sadly put about if I didn't know how to read."

"You're a woman," retorted Caleb, "and have got time on your hands; 'tis all very well for you."

Martha smiled.

"I often wish you could read too; and you've said so yourself, Caleb, before now."

An hour after there was a sharp rap at the door, and a voice called out,

"May I come in, Master Wilks?"

"Yes, to be sure. What's up now, Jessie?"

"Nothing; only, as I'd done my work, I thought to myself I'd come and sit here a bit with Martha, and tell her the news." So saying, Jessie Norris, Mr. Warner's servant-maid, came in and sat down on a chair by the door, crossing her arms over her chest, and looking brimfull of excitement.

"I've had such a talk with the new servant."

"What new servant?" asked Martha.

"Why, you see, the luggage came soon after master had arrived, and with it was the new servant, who has lived with the young lady several years; and she it was who told me all about her; but 'tis such a long story, I shall never get to the end. However," she said, "Mrs. Warner's father was once a tradesman in Birmingham; but he failed, and lost nearly everything; so after that, he went to live in a small way at a house somewhere out of the town, where the mother died, leaving him with two daughters. The elder one married an American man, against her father's will, and went out to the States, or some such place, where they never heard of her till the

news came she was dead, and then the old man fell ill, and went off in a decline. The other is our young lady. The servant seems very partial to her, and says we are sure to like her. But I haven't seen her yet, and I never take what other people say."

Jessie paused to recover her breath, and then continued—

"There's a great deal more she told me about Mrs. Warner; as, how clever she was, and how well she managed in the little house her father had. Why, she can cook, and bake, and understands all manner of house work. I only hope she won't be interfering with me, for that's what I can't stand."

"You needn't meet troubles half way," said Martha; "but aint you glad they're come, and it's all like to be so pleasant?"

"How can I tell it will be pleasant? There's no knowing. I never take to strange faces, and that's why I came across here this evening; the house don't seem like itself, so full of boxes, and bustling, and noise. I'm glad enough to sit still a few minutes."

"But I hope, Jessie, you're not likely to be wanted. It wouldn't do for your mistress to find you out the first night. Besides, maybe she wouldn't wish you to be out at all of an evening; some ladies don't."

Jessie paid no attention to this suggestive advice.

"There, now, I'm forgetting to tell you another piece of news the servant told me. She says we are sure to have family prayers morning and evening, for Mrs. Warner couldn't be happy without it, and master is sure to give in to her, and do whatever she likes. What do you think of that, Martha?"

"That it's quite a right thing to have, and you'll find the comfort of it."

"Indeed, I don't believe I shall; it will oblige me to hurry away from my work in the morning, and stop me from going to have a chat with my friends in the evening."

"Well, there may come a time when you'll think about it differently," observed Martha, gravely.

"Perhaps so; there's no knowing," said Jessie, wiping her fresh, handsome face with the corner of her apron, and preparing to go back to the farm.

A voice called her from without, as of some one groping along in the narrow garden-path. She quickly started up, and disappeared in the darkness, while Martha shook her head—

"If family prayers prevented these young girls from wandering about after dusk, and kept them at home in the evening, it would be a good thing, even if it did nothing more."

"If we get a good lady up at the farm, maybe she'll care for the poor Oakswood folk, and see after them a bit."

"I don't know as they wants more seeing after nor they have, Missus," said Caleb. "Why, there's the master himself, as nice a man as ever walked; aint he always ready to do any one a good turn? And then Parson Willoughby?"

"Quite true. I meant no disrespect to our master, for there aint a better one in the world, nor yet to good Mr. Willoughby; but he can't find time to see to all his own people in Ellaston, much less us out here; for we all know he hasn't money to pay a curate; and, to be sure, 'tis up-hill work for one man to see after those hundreds of souls, let him be ever so strong; and he, as looks so thin and pale, just for all the world as if he was in a consumption. I know his will is good, and he works hard among his people; that nobody can deny; but he can't do more than a man can do. Besides, even if he could, he lives too far off to be like one of us."

"We do very well as we are," said Caleb, shaking the tobacco out of his pipe. "For my part, I don't see what there's amiss about us, and I can't abide new brooms—people as comes to undo whatever them as has gone before them did; and, though I likes the looks of our young lady, yet I hope she's not a going to be one of that sort. I think better things of her, that I do." And Caleb resumed his pipe.

CHAPTER II.

"HOME!
There's magic in that little word;
It is a mystic circle, which surrounds
Comforts and virtues never known
Beyond the hallowed limit."

"Oh, what a treasure is a virtuous wife,
Discreet and loving: not one gift on earth
Makes a man's life so nighly bound to Heaven.
She gives him double graces, to endure
And to enjoy, by being one with him."

CHAPMAN.

CHAPTER II.

COLWALL Manor Farm was a pleasant specimen of an English homestead. It was built of substantial brick, with white stone mouldings over the windows. A soft green lawn, interspersed with flower-beds and one or two feathering trees, sloped down from the south side of the house to a clear, shallow pond, where ducks and geese cackled and dabbled in the sparkling water. The front-door looked east, and was approached by a short entrance-drive, encircling a round plat of grass, dotted with laurels, hollies, and flowering shrubs; and to the back of the house stretched out a large, busy, well-furnished farm-yard.

Green fields bounded the little domain right and left, and the Malvern hills, with their flowing outline, rose in the background. A prettier farmer's home could not be seen. Margaret showed her full appreciation of it in her bright beaming eyes, as she looked out of the little sitting-room window on the first evening of their arrival.

It was a moment the young farmer had for months looked forward to, and it was no slight pleasure to him to see how entirely she could admire the home he delighted in, and which he had felt only wanted her presence to make it perfect. So he told her, in loving words, as she stood gazing silently through the open window; and a quiet smile of gratitude was her answer.

Some weeks passed by, leaving Margaret time enough to make some household arrangements and settle her own things, when the unpleasant ordeal of receiving visits began.

The sitting-room had been newly done up by Philip Warner in honour of his young wife, with blue damask curtains to the windows, and a pretty bright chintz on the chairs and sofa. A round table stood in the middle of the room, covered with several pretty books (presents either to himself or his wife), and a vase of flowers in the centre. A beautiful new work-box of inlaid wood, with *papier maché* inkstand and portfolio, together with other wedding presents, were arranged on a smaller table against the wall; and the chimney-piece was adorned with a handsome old clock, which had come to Mr. Warner as part of his share of his father's valuables. In this room Margaret received her visitors,—not without a beating heart and fearful spirit, though no one could have detected these secret feelings in her calm,

gentle manner. The outward working was only noticed by her husband, who saw that on all these occasions she was paler and more silent than usual.

Among the various callers at Colwall Manor Farm were Carter Smith (Philip's step-brother) and his wife. They lived in the town of Ellaston, some three miles off, Carter Smith being a prosperous attorney. The brothers had not been much thrown together, and the intercourse which had taken place during the past few years was too often chilled by the repulsive haughtiness of Mrs. Carter Smith, who held farmers in general in great contempt, and considered an intimacy with her brother-in-law rather derogatory to her dignity as an attorney's wife. Consequently, the formal call, and still more formal dinner-party, were the only links of brotherhood left.

Mrs. Carter Smith thought it most condescending of her to visit "poor Philip's wife," the more so as it was a marriage which, in her opinion, was so far beneath him; and when she drove up to Colwall Manor farm with her husband to pay her first call, it was partly from curiosity, and partly from a wish to display her own superiority, and humble Margaret by the sight of her elegant dress and refined manners.

Certainly, if Margaret was not abashed by the sight of Mrs. Carter Smith's gay silk and gaudy bonnet, she was a good deal surprised.

Philip had never spoken of his relations beyond mentioning the fact of their living near. This was on principle; "What business," he thought, "have I to set my wife against my own kith and kin?" So Margaret never found out his feelings towards these relations till she noticed the distressed and annoyed look that came over his fine, honest face, as they entered the little sitting-room.

Her kind and quiet manner rather puzzled Mrs. Carter Smith, and made her feel awkward, for she was accustomed to the homage of the Ellaston ladies. She managed, however, to show that she did not consider Margaret on an equality with herself, and even went so far as to comment on the simple dress she wore. Margaret said she found it impossible to do her household business in anything that did not wash.

"Then you join in the household work, do you?" asked Mrs. Carter Smith.

"In the morning I always help in the dairy."

"Indeed! I suppose you have no servants? I was not aware of that."

"Oh yes!" Margaret almost smiled; "we have sufficient for all purposes; but, with a large dairy-farm, there is a great deal to see to, and I think it is better done if the farmer's wife superintends."

"So do I, Margaret," said her husband, with a glow of admiration beaming in his eye as he looked at her; "and I hope you will never be laughed out

of it. I don't like to see a woman ashamed of her position, or fancying she will be less respected for doing her duty well."

Mrs. Carter Smith made no remark; she merely smiled scornfully, at the same time glancing round the room.

"You have no piano, I see!"

"It is not come yet," answered Margaret; "but Philip has got one for me; he is so fond of music, and so am I."

"Can you play, then?"

"A little; just enough to make it a pleasure to myself, and accompany myself when I sing."

Philip caught the gist of the conversation, although he was talking at the time to his brother.

"She is a very good musician, and plays the harmonium exceedingly well," he said.

Margaret blushed.

"It is a pity we have not got you at Ellaston to help the organist there," said Mrs. Carter Smith; "he plays dreadfully; but Mr. Willoughby has not an idea of music, and, consequently, leaves us to his tender mercies. The singing is so bad, too—nothing but the most lugubrious hymns and Gregorian chants, which the people cannot sing in tune. For my part, I think we did a great deal better when we had a selected choir of men, who gave us fine old hymn-tunes and anthems."

The conversation changed. Cake and wine was sent for. The wedding-presents were scrutinized, and then Carter Smith called Philip aside to talk over a matter of business with him; after which, much to Margaret's relief, this most unpleasant visit came to an end.

A single interchange of looks, which spoke volumes, was all that passed between Philip and his wife, except that he laid his great sunburnt hand on her soft auburn hair, and said, half aloud, as if finishing some train of thought,—

"I wish Carter Smith had had such a wife as I have, he would have been a different man."

Margaret drew the hand within her own. "Hush, Philip! you had better wait a few years before you say that."

Philip's answer was a smile of present satisfaction, and then he began pacing about the room, his hands in his pockets, evidently in deep thought.

"How about your plan, Margaret? were you really in earnest yesterday when you spoke to our rector about allowing you to try and get Martha Wilks to help you in teaching some of the Oakswood children on Sundays, and turning her into Infant School mistress?"

"That is a far too high-sounding name for my plan, only I could not help thinking, from what you said, that she would be just the sort of person to

help me; of course we must consult Mr. Willoughby about it first, but, from what he has said, I am sure he will approve; we calculated that upwards of twenty children might be collected from Oakswood. These would be too many for one to teach, their ages vary so much."

"Well, if you like, we can walk across the field, and talk the arrangement over with Martha. I would gladly give her a trifle each year for helping you. The children might assemble in the kitchen here. But you can settle this as you like, and give your own orders, Maggie."

Margaret's face sparkled with pleasure. Young as she was, she had never lived the aimless, pointless life which is so common in people of her class. The loss of parents; the ill-fated marriage, and then the bitter news of the death of her friend and only sister in a far-distant land; the desolate home, and sorrowful feeling of being an orphan,—all these had early taught her to look for happiness in the service of her Heavenly Father, her unchangeable Friend: and she had already realized that no joy can be compared to that of taking up the Saviour's light and easy yoke, leaning upon His unseen Arm, and walking in His paths of peace. Consequently, her first thoughts, in settling at her new home, had been to find out where she could do good. She had not long to wait before the neglected state of Oakswood came

to her notice; and, although Mr. Willoughby had given a weekly cottage-lecture there ever since he became rector of Ellaston, yet he could not find time to do much more than this, when the claims of several thousand souls in the town demanded so much from him, and caused him to labour, in season and out of season, far beyond his strength.

This, then, was a field opened to Margaret by Him who, in whatever part of the great world He places His servants, means them therein to work for Him, as faithful husbandmen, who will one day be called to account for their stewardship.

Mr. Willoughby had some previous knowledge of Margaret's character from a friend who had been acquainted with her mother; and, when she went to him and asked his advice as to how she might be of use at Oakswood, he was satisfied that she was fully competent to begin and carry out the plan which was now so much in her thoughts. He gave her books and counsel, and bade her heartily God speed, rejoicing that he should have a helper in that distant hamlet—one who would strive to minister to the highest wants of the people in that part of his overgrown parish.

Later in the afternoon, the farmer and his wife went to Martha's cottage, much to her delight. She wiped the best chair she possessed with her clean white apron, for Mrs. Warner to sit upon, and then

Philip, after giving her time for a few simple congratulations on his marriage, and admiring looks at his sweet young wife, explained the object of their visit. But the poor woman said at once, she was quite sure she could never teach others, since she knew so little herself.

Margaret looked disappointed.

"But Mrs. Warner would take the older children, Martha; what she wants is more some one to help in keeping the younger ones quiet; and I am sure you could do that."

"Well, sir, I am ready to do anything you and your lady wish; and, maybe, if 'tis only taking care of the little ones, I might manage it; though I've never been in the way of it much."

"All beginnings are difficult, says the proverb; but, for my part, I can't see, Martha, why you shouldn't make a first-rate schoolmistress."

"Eh, sir, you're a laughing at me now," said Martha, blushing and smiling; "but if the lady will make allowances for my being no scholar,"—she turned half round to Margaret—"and will kindly put me a little in the way of it, I dare say I might do better than I think for; and, anyhow, I'll do my best."

"Thank you very much," said Margaret, warmly. "So, then, we may hope to get a few of the carters' lads and children together on Sunday week, perhaps;

meanwhile I should be much obliged if you would name it to the parents of the children, and I dare say I shall have opportunity of doing this also before the day arrives."

Margaret still looked thoughtful, and made no move to leave the cottage, till her husband stepped towards the door; this roused her courage.

"May I send you some books which Mr. Willoughby has given me to look at, and which would be nice for the little ones on Sunday?"

Martha brightened up.

"If you please, ma'am, and if it isn't troubling you too much, I should like to get more knowledge myself before I teach them; but I've had so little learning, and read so badly, that I'm afraid you'll be sorely disappointed in me."

Mr. Warner had left the cottage, and Margaret said, in a low voice,

"If you love our Blessed Saviour yourself, and will try and teach these little ones to love Him also, it is worth all the book-learning in the world."

Tears came into Martha's eyes.

"I wish to love Him and serve Him above everything; and if I thought I could ever tell others of His goodness to me, it would make me so glad—so very thankful; but I haven't words."

Philip called, and Margaret could only say, as she took Martha's hand in hers—

"Do come and read with me sometimes up at the farm; it would be good for us both, and prepare us for our work."

Martha gratefully assented, and Margaret ran to join her husband. He was impatiently spudding thistles out of his grass field, waiting to take his wife a new walk, and show her the boundaries of the farm on the Ellaston side. Very lovely it was, too, as they ascended a bank of grass and furze, higher and higher, till, from the top, the rich wooded country, with its varied undulations and half-hidden cottages lay beneath them, bathed in the glowing light of the setting sun.

They sat and watched the scene until the murmur of life which the wind carried upwards subsided into almost entire stillness, only broken by the lazy drone of a homeward-bound humble bee, or the distant tinkling of sheep-bells.

Then the dew fell heavily, and night shrouded the fair scene.

In spite of all Margaret's entreaties, Philip pulled off his loose overcoat, and insisted on throwing it round her, and wrapping her in it till they reached home.

CHAPTER III.

"Guard thy best treasure from the venomed sting
Of baneful peevishness. Oh! never prove
How soon ill-temper's power can banish gentle Love!"

TIGHE.

"Man and wife are equally concerned to avoid all offences of each other in the first beginning of their conversation."

JEREMY TAYLOR.

CHAPTER III.

THE nearest neighbours the Warners had were Farmer Winslade and his wife. His fields adjoined those of the Manor Farm, and, by a footpath across them, the distance between their homes could not be more than half a mile.

Mr. Winslade was not prosperous. He lacked the active habits and energetic mind which tend to raise and enrich a man. Early hours and constant attention to his business were irksome to him; and, as his wife had brought him a good fortune of her own, he felt it unnecessary to exert himself in adding to his means. The consequence was, that he left the farm very much to the bad management of subordinates, while he spent his time in hunting, shooting, buying and selling horses, and going about the country in search of excitement.

Mrs. Winslade meanwhile was toiling and moiling at home, poor thing, striving to keep up appearances, and do her best for the outward prosperity of the four young children.

She was the only daughter and heiress of a wealthy surgeon in Ross; and as both her parents died early, leaving her to the careless guardianship of an old aunt, she married Mr. Winslade at eighteen, knowing next to nothing about him. Her education had not been such as to fit her for entering early into the responsibilities of married life, or to make her either useful or happy in them. She had been sent to a fashionable boarding-school near London, where the young ladies were taught to paint flowers—to play a few tunes on the piano —to work crochet collars and cuffs, and to talk bad French; but as none of these accomplishments enable a woman to fulfil the better her duties as wife, mother, or mistress of a house, Gertrude Winslade discovered to her dismay, that in spite of her fashionable education, she was utterly ignorant of everything really useful or practical; and as household anxieties and the cares of a mother came upon her, she found it very uphill work to grapple with them. Her husband's extravagance, and the effort to appear wealthy and prosperous, made her task all the more difficult.

On account of her former position, she was received into the best society at Ellaston, and patronized by Mrs. Carter Smith. To preserve this connexion, it was needful for the Winslades to spend far more than they could afford; but many a

necessary comfort and much peace of mind was sacrificed to this miserable ambition, and all they gained in return was restless dissatisfaction and discontent.

It never struck Mrs. Winslade that there were people in the world who could like her or her children unless they were well dressed. A ring at the front-door bell occasioned such a scuffle to drag the poor children out of sight, and, on her own part, to struggle hurriedly into her silk dress before the visitors should be announced, that it increased her natural irritability and nervousness to a deplorable degree. The little ones often suffered from it in the peevish and unjust fault-finding at the moment when domestic comfort had to be put aside for outward effect before strangers.

They were growing up to judge everybody else as it appeared others must judge their mother, and very soon their respect and admiration were given to the wearer of silk and satin, while those in humble apparel were looked down upon.

Poor Gertrude had read novels at school, but seldom opened that precious Book in which we read of the Lord of lords and King of kings, who for our sakes became a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief; who was born in a lowly manger—lived with the poor—was subject to poor parents; who had not where to lay His Blessed Head, and whose

kingdom was not of this world. Had she done so, she would not, perhaps, have toiled so hard after phantoms, or neglected the interests of her immortal soul for day-dreams.

Mrs. Winslade had several times visited Margaret since her arrival at the Colwall Manor Farm, and always returned to The Elms with reluctance.

Everything there seemed so full of peace and love, and contrasted so painfully with her own ill-arranged home. She felt jealous of Margaret's happiness, and angry with her husband for not showing her the kindness and tenderness which Philip showed his wife.

The result was just what might be expected,—cross words and mutual recriminations. Notwithstanding this, Gertrude felt irresistibly drawn towards Margaret, and wondered at her while she listened to the stories of her work and labour of love, which were carried from tongue to tongue among the Oakswood people.

"What a very strange person Mrs. Warner is," she said one evening to her husband, "to make such a fuss about the poor. Why, she has got to know all the lads about the farm, they say, and sees to them as if they were her own. On Wednesdays they go and spend the evening up there, and she and Mr. Warner teach them to read and write. Then, I heard to-day that she teaches a number of

Oakswood children on Sundays. I can't understand her the least."

"Oh, she's nothing better to do at present. I suppose she's an active-minded woman, and must be after something. She'll get tired of it in a little time, when the novelty goes by; but I do wonder at Warner giving in to all her ideas. He's more weak than I should be; and I expect he'll wake up some day to see his mistake."

"Is it true that he is very well off, and getting richer every day?"

"I believe so; but I guess she'll soon spend all he gains in her charities and extravagances."

"Well, she may do so," said Gertrude, thoughtfully; "but she does not spend much on herself, I am sure,—certainly not on her dress, at all events."

"E'm! I daresay. She doesn't need to, for she's an uncommonly pretty woman. I don't wonder at Warner's choice, if only she had had a better bringing up."

"Yes, indeed it is a pity. Mrs. Carter Smith told me in confidence she could not cultivate any intimacy with her, though she is so nearly related, on account of her connexions; but she has invited them to tea next week, and says all their acquaintance must begin and end in this annual civility. She has begged us to go and help her, as she rather

dislikes the sort of thing; but really I have no dress fit to wear."

"Well, I've no money to buy you a new one," said her husband, doggedly, knowing what he might expect.

"Then you don't care what I look like? Indeed I must dress in a manner befitting my position."

"That's what you are always casting in my teeth, as if anybody cared what you wear."

"I only know Mrs. Carter Smith will not thank me for going to one of her parties in my old silk, which she has seen a hundred times; and if you care to keep up her acquaintance, you must find money to buy something new."

"I haven't a sixpence to give you."

"Then where on earth does the money go? I know I brought you a good fortune; but you have wasted and squandered it till you scarcely give me and the children clothes to our backs. I suppose you will say next you have not money to buy food for us; and yet you find enough, somewhere or other, to spend on your own selfish pleasures,—your hunting, and horse-dealing, and wanderings about the country."

Gertrude spoke angrily and bitterly, while her husband irritated her the more by preserving a sullen silence; at last he left the room, to escape

this outbreak of temper. Such scenes were not uncommon; and although it generally followed that Gertrude obtained her own way, and bought whatever she wanted, yet it was at the expense of her husband's love and her own happiness. Each fresh scene between them left an indelible scar on his feelings towards her, and made him look on his home with less affection; so that he sought all the more greedily after excitement in order to drive away gloomy thoughts of domestic quarrels and cares.

If Gertrude wondered why Philip Warner should love his wife more than Winslade loved her, she need not have gone far to find the answer. The hard, cold world, which was her idol, had stepped into the farmer's home, and brought the usual consequences in its train. "Bear and forbear," that golden motto of married life, was disregarded, and its gentle voice hushed, amid the perplexities of trying to strive after the world's greatness and applause.

There are, it is said, near the borders of the Dead Sea, apples to be found, of beautiful and luscious appearance, which rejoice the eye of weary travellers in those dry, burnt-up regions. Quickly they hurry on, in anticipation of quenching their thirst with the tempting fruit; the hand is stretched out, the apple picked, and eagerly put to the mouth; but it bursts in the grasp, and contains a dry

powder, nauseous and bitter to the taste. What the apple is to the disappointed travellers, the pleasures of the world were to Gertrude,—eagerly longed for, but most unsatisfying when attained.

CHAPTER IV.

"THEY were so one, it never could be said
Which of them ruled, or which of them obeyed.
He ruled, because she would obey; and she
By him obeying, ruled as well as he.
There ne'er was known betwixt them a dispute,
Save which the other's will should execute."

CHAPTER IV.

If entire union of heart and feeling in married life were sufficient to constitute perfect earthly happiness, Margaret might have been said to have attained it. But no such thing as perfect happiness can be found here in any rank or in any lot of life. Surface happiness is often so attractively described in novels, and mere joyous fragments of real life are culled so artistically to mislead those who are taking their first step into its realities, that the contrast between the books they read and the trials and annoyances they really meet with produces a discontented, sour state of mind, and unfits them in many cases to encounter bravely the sorrows of every-day life.

As a rule, the greater the outward prosperity, the deeper the responsibilities; and so long as there are failings in the heart, weak health to weigh down the spirits, and servants to overlook and answer for, the most apparently cloudless lot of the happiest bride will surely not be without its cares. Nor

would it be good for an immortal being were it otherwise. There is love hidden behind each trifling annoyance and each petty household care, could we but read it as our Heavenly Father intends us to do; and if the words, "This is not your rest," shine out before the irritated mind when troubled beneath a weight of daily worries, how would it soothe and raise upwards the earthly eye, apt as it is to lose sight of the end of all things, and to sweep carefully the blinding dust,* while it sees not the golden crown held above for its acceptance.

Margaret had her full share of such trials; she found that the servant who had done well under a bachelor's rule proved restive under that of a mistress. Jessie said she liked her "liberty," which meant, that she liked to be able to go about and gossip among her friends of Oakswood in the evening, or welcome them to a seat in the kitchen when they found time to visit her. Accordingly, after Margaret had warned her for the second time that she could not allow her to be absent at prayer-time, and still, a month afterwards, Jessie transgressed once more, she was told kindly, but decidedly, that she must leave.

Jessie begged, and promised it should never happen again; she confessed how wrong it had been,

* Pilgrim's Progress.

and entreated Mrs. Warner to try her this once only, so earnestly, that Margaret's heart relented, and she was reinstated in her former place. But her conduct gave rise to many an accusation against her mistress. "Good works should begin at home," it was said; and that Mrs. Warner had better reform her cook before she tried to reform the village.

Jessie's imprudent tongue had clothed with false colours Margaret's efforts to establish a Sunday-school. In a moment of irritation at having her freedom curtailed, she had stated that the real object was to get the children's pennies, though not a word of payment had been mentioned when the little ones were invited to come. This absurd accusation spread like wildfire, and was implicitly believed by the simple people, who as yet had but little knowledge of such disinterested love as Margaret's. Next Sunday, to her astonishment and vexation, only seven children came to the farm Sunday-school, instead of twenty who had been there the previous Sunday. She could not make out the cause of this sudden fall in the numbers, as no severe illness was prevalent, and there seemed no accountable reason for it; but as Martha walked to church through Oakswood, she was taunted by "Who wants to squeeze pennies out of the poor?" When the unpleasant incident was repeated to Margaret, she instantly ex-

claimed, "An enemy hath done this!" But what enemy? and from whence could such a report have originated?

The idea of suspecting Jessie never entered her mind; and she made no effort to inquire who it could be that had thus, at the outset, so damaged her prospering little school.

She did not look at second causes, but felt sure the disappointment was sent as a check to self-confidence; and, having laid all her care before Him who seeth in secret, she waited patiently until He should see fit to reward her openly.

This did not make her relax her efforts to bring back the deserters; but she met with so much opposition or indifference from the parents, that, for many months, her weekly gathering averaged only from five to eight.

Philip many times urged her to give up the attempt, and spoke rather bitterly of the ingratitude of the people; but she only smiled, and cheerfully prophesied better days, while Mr. Willoughby, to whom she opened her heart, exhorted her not to be discouraged, but to hold on her way stedfastly, and hopefully believing that all these untoward circumstances would, in the end, work together for good. Margaret's lot was such a bright one, that she could not dwell for long on these crosses. If she felt inclined to despond, she remembered how much there

was to make her thankful, in that her husband aided her so cordially in all her plans for good.

Some weeks later, the cook mentioned many uncomfortable, and almost dishonest things in which Jessie was found to be implicated, but which she had not liked to speak of to her young mistress before, from a dread of taking away the girl's character too hastily. It is needless, however, to dwell on these; suffice it to say that Jessie left the Manor Farm. There was an air of bold defiance in her look and manner as, for the last time, she entered the little room where her faithful mistress wished to speak to her before they parted. No symptom of regret or shame were traceable on her face, and she answered Margaret's gentle, reproachful, and warning words with a toss of the head and curling lip. Many would have ceased remonstrating with the wilful girl; and Margaret found it passing hard to say what she thought it was her duty to say. The words came out slowly, seriously, and affectionately, as of a sister to a sister, but they fell like hail on a slate roof. Jessie stood motionless and unconcerned. The sympathy, the counsel, and the warning voice were unheeded then, and she only made an awkward courtesy, and left the room.

Margaret sat some time in silent thought, her eyes apparently engaged in looking out of the window into the little flower-garden, but her thoughts

travelling onward into the unknown land of Jessie's future.

It was not long, however, that she remained in a brown study. There was plenty to be done, and, when all household matters were arranged, she ran upstairs for her straw hat and gloves, and, going out of the glass folding-doors which led into the flower-garden, she saw her husband standing in the walk, reading a note.

He turned round to meet her, and handed her the pink-scented sheet, with a shade of annoyance on his face.

"From Matilda Smith, Maggie; an invitation to tea there next week; but I shan't go, or let you go; so you had better write and say so."

"What excuse can we give, Philip?"

"Oh, say—I am engaged—business; dear me, you can easily make out some reason."

Margaret looked bewildered.

"Surely you are not in earnest?"

"Indeed I am—never was more so. I could not go to any place—even my own brother's, where they would not treat my wife with respect."

She drew her hand through his arm.

"If you will take my advice, dear Philip, and do what I should like best, you *will* go."

"No, Maggie, I will not. There's no use talking about it. I dare say you don't care how people treat

you, but I do; and I have a greater knowledge of Matilda Smith than you have. As long as she comes here I can be civil and kind to her; but it is different to put you in her way when I can avoid it. There's no need to seek an intimacy when she doesn't wish it."

"Surely it is hardly right of us to refuse going to your brother's house, Philip, however painful it may be."

"I won't talk of him; he is my brother, but I cannot take tea there, and I should be glad if you would write the refusal at once."

"And it is all on my account! and I shall be the means of separating still more widely brothers who ought to be friends! Oh, please don't think of me, Philip! I would rather go; it may produce a kindlier feeling on their part towards us."

Philip coloured with pride, and the words, "I had rather be without their kind feeling," were hovering on his lips, but he did not speak them out aloud, and answered,—

"There are plenty of opportunities for producing kindly feeling, without the bore of going through a tea-party at Matilda Smith's for it."

"It seems to me we shall do very wrong if we refuse to go, however unpleasant to ourselves. It will make the uncomfortable feeling between us doubly uncomfortable, and Mrs. Carter Smith can

truly say, if we decline her invitation, 'I held out the hand of fellowship to them, but they would not take it!' Besides which, I really don't know what excuse I can give for refusing. Will you write the note yourself, Philip?" she said, entreatingly.

Philip laughed.

"Oh, Maggie, you are very cunning! a regular diplomatist! I suppose I shall have to put my own wishes, pride, and inclination in my pocket, and let you do as you like. But if I go, remember, it is under protest; and I shall consider myself the most henpecked, trampled-upon husband that ever lived."

"No, no; I do not want you to agree with me in this way, Philip; 'a man convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still!' If you cannot accept the invitation willingly, we had better not go at all."

"That I shall never do, for I never yet went there willingly."

"Perhaps I ought to say, if you cannot go of your own free will—and this is not so very impossible, for you are as anxious as I am to be good friends with Carter and his wife."

"Well—yes, if they behave with proper respect to you—not unless."

"Do leave me out of the question; if you are with me, I do not really mind where I go; and Carter was very goodnatured to me the day they called."

"But she was insolent—detestable in her manner!" said Philip, fiercely.

"Oh, this is not right, indeed it is not; you never spoke of her like this before."

"Because she never angered me as she did that day. No man can stand to see his wife insulted. I bore it at the time, but, my word, I never can again. As long as there was no chance of seeing her I dismissed it from my mind; but, at the prospect of her being with you again, it comes back with fresh violence."

"Then let us talk of something else, and by and by you will be more inclined to pity than to blame her."

"The more you urge me to go to this unlucky tea-party, the more angry I feel against Matilda; why she is not fit to be in the same room with you. Come, don't look so distressed, Maggie, I will do just what you wish, so write your note, and say we will come."

Margaret looked up very doubtfully at this sudden decision; she walked on by his side, and made no movement to go and write the note.

"Well, now you will not go when you have gained your point! what more must I say and do?"

"Tell me if you fully consent?"

"Fully—quite fully. I have been indulging an angry, unchristian spirit—away with it! You are right, as you always are, Maggie, and we will go

and try what kindness and goodwill can do, even with Matilda Smith—bah! there it is again, and I had better hold my tongue, or I shall be saying something else I ought not."

Margaret pressed his arm fondly. She saw what the effort cost him, and thanked God that pride had been for this time discomfited, and humility victorious!

The note of acceptance was written, and put into the hands of the messenger, who was waiting to carry it back to Ellaston.

On arriving at its destination, Mrs. Carter Smith opened it, and, after glancing her eye over the sheet, exclaimed to her husband,—

"Dear me! I made up my mind they would not come; but I might have had more sense than to suppose she would refuse an invitation *here!*"

CHAPTER V.

"Wherever in the world I am,
In whatsoe'er estate,
I have a fellowship with hearts
To keep and cultivate,
And a work of lowly love to do
For the Lord, on whom I wait."

CHAPTER V.

THERE were a good many visitors who knocked at Mr. Carter Smith's door on the evening of the party. Some came on foot, from houses in the town, others drove from the neighbourhood in chaises and dog-carts; and, amongst the latter, were Philip and Margaret.

Mrs. Carter Smith received each new arrival politely, though condescendingly, and acted the hostess to perfection in the eyes of the Ellaston ladies.

It would have been difficult to detect, from her manner to Margaret, that she bore a secret dislike to her; for Mrs. Carter Smith considered it ill-bred in her own house to show coldness to any of her guests; and the perpetual smile, which she could always wear on her countenance at pleasure, effectually concealed her hidden contempt.

This new phase of manner in her sister-in-law quite astonished Margaret, who was all sincerity herself, and she even began to think Mrs. Carter Smith must like her more than she had imagined, when

she took her courteously by the hand, and introduced her to several of the ladies present. Philip, too, was pleased, and not a little gratified, by seeing the interest which Margaret excited.

After the first bustle of announcements and greetings had a little subsided, and the various guests had settled down in groups, some sitting, and some standing, Margaret's attention was arrested by hearing Mrs. Carter Smith exclaim—

"Yes, indeed! I was truly distressed to hear about it. Poor Mrs. Winslade! And she is naturally so easily alarmed and over-anxious, I dread the effect of it on her nerves. She sent for me at once; but of course, under the circumstances, it was impossible for me to go. I could do no good, and my own idea is, that she has rather exaggerated the case."

One of those standing by joined in, having caught a part of Mrs. Carter Smith's remarks,—

"I was out hunting, myself, to-day, and saw the accident. Poor fellow! it was an awful fall. He always rides hard and leads the field when he can; but, if I am not very much mistaken, it will be the last time he will be able to do so. Dalton thinks very badly of him. He fell, with his horse upon him, when taking a five-barred gate; his hunter was out of breath, but he pushed him on, and paid dear for his rashness. I never saw a worse fall.

Mrs. Carter Smith looked distressed.

"How very dreadful! really, it must be a warning to you all. Poor Mr. Winslade! That reminds me we expected Mr. Dalton this evening, but I see he has not arrived, so I conclude he is still at The Elms. We must hope for the best."

"And do our best," thought Margaret, looking across the room towards her husband, who was just hearing particulars of the accident from one of the gentlemen present.

"Is anybody with Winslade except his wife?" asked Philip of his informant.

"That I don't exactly know, but I believe not. Poor creature! she is in a dreadful state about him, I hear. Mrs. Carter Smith was sent for, and it appears she could not go. It was said, an hour since, that Dalton didn't expect him to live through the night."

"Ah! a shocking business!" ejaculated Mr. Carter Smith, entering into the conversation; "and, of course, nothing can be done as long as he remains unconscious. I have often said he would come to grief some day; he rides harder than any man I know, and is not over particular about his horses;—such a vicious creature as the last one he bought, I would not have had him at a gift."

"Nor I," said another.

"Winslade was never much of a judge of horses, though he would not thank me for saying so. Why,

what a screw that was he bought of Gilham, the horse-breaker, and gave a long price for it, too. He asked me what I thought of it, and I told him straight out, that it would not last a day with his weight, and it didn't. The first run we had it fell with him and broke its collar-bone, and smashed itself all to pieces."

So the conversation drifted off from the dying man to the relative merits of hunters, and the gentlemen present became warm and eloquent on the characteristic points of their own and other people's horses, and the hunting prospects of the opening season.

Philip's mind was too much occupied in picturing the forlorn state of his neighbour to enter into these ordinary topics. He would gladly have gone at once to offer his help at The Elms, but neither he nor Margaret had any particular call to do so; and though he made up his mind to drive home that way and look in, yet he did not feel justified in leaving Mrs. Carter Smith's party, however much he was convinced of the need there was of immediate support and sympathy for poor Mrs. Winslade.

Margaret was as much disturbed in mind as her husband; and she found it most difficult to take the part which courtesy required in the tittle-tattle of those around her. After Mrs. Carter Smith had given vent to a few sympathizing and endearing ex-

pressions concerning her poor friend, Gertrude Winslade, and all the ladies present had done the same; each felt they had relieved their consciences, and fulfilled a duty they owed to society.

By-and-bye the topic was dismissed, and they turned to more cheerful and congenial subjects.

Tea was announced. The conversation became general and animated, and Mrs. Carter Smith was quite in her element; while everybody, except Philip and Margaret, seemed to enter into the spirit of the passing hour.

Shortly after they had sat down, the door opened, and the servant announced—

"Mr. Dalton."

It was instantly half closed again, and a voice was heard saying, in a loud, hurried whisper—

"I am not going in, my man; it is not the time to be enjoying myself, when I haven't half done my work. I am not going in—but hark ye, is Mr. Warner there?"

At this moment Mr. Carter Smith came out of the room to shake hands with Mr. Dalton, and press him to come in; but the last words had caught Philip's ear. He jumped up, and was in the hall before the doctor could give an answer to the invitation.

"Ah, Warner, you are the man!" he exclaimed; "step this way, will you? I want a word with you."

They went together towards the front door, and the little doctor took Warner by the button-hole, and said, in a confidential voice—

"Could Mrs. Warner go to The Elms, think you? That poor creature there can do nothing, and asked for your wife. Will she be a good Samaritan, and look in upon her as soon as is convenient?"

"Certainly," answered Philip. "Had we not better start at once?"

The doctor paused, let go his hold on Philip, and glanced down at his spattered boots reflectingly.

"Well, I grieve to say it is a bad case, there is no denying it; and not a person in the house with a head on their shoulders. Mrs. Winslade can't act any more than a child—in fact, I don't know what to make of her."

It was quite enough; and Philip went back into the room to fetch his wife and apologise to Mrs. Carter Smith for their necessary absence, while Mr. Carter Smith was in vain trying to persuade Mr. Dalton to join the party.

"I could not, indeed—quite impossible," he said; "I've got to go back to The Elms almost directly—must be off at once—thank you all the same. Good bye!"

As he hurried away, Mr. Carter Smith called after him—

"By the bye, how did you leave poor Winslade?"

"Oh, bad case—very bad;" and, waving his hand, he was soon out of sight.

The sun was setting behind the tall elms from which the farm took its name, as Philip and Margaret stopped at the garden-gate. Work seemed suspended. The cart-horses stood in the carts. The cattle were unmilked. The only labourer about was leaning, his arms a-kimbo, on the low farm-yard wall, and gazing vacantly at some pigs which were snuffing and rooting among the turf before the house. The other labourers had acted on the report, "Master's a-dying," and had set off to the nearest public-house.

Things looked forlorn and deserted.

As the dog-cart stopped, the man roused up, opened the yard-gate, and came forward to hold Mr. Warner's horse.

The door was ajar, and sounds of talking and wailing met Mrs. Warner's ear as she entered. She tapped at the dining-room door, and Mrs. Winslade's voice said, peevishly,—

"Just see who it is, Jessie; I cannot have anybody here. Oh dear me, children, keep quiet! don't you know the doctor says it will kill your poor father, if you go on like that?" And then she burst out into a wild paroxysm of tears, burying her face in her hands, and sobbing aloud.

The children took no notice of her beyond staring at her with wonder, and then turned to continue a game with two terrier puppies, whose piteous whining under the hugging and pulling which they had to undergo, added to the Babel of sounds.

Margaret went up to Gertrude, and, putting her hand on her shoulder, said gently, "I am come to help you."

Gertrude looked up wildly, and, seeing Margaret, she jumped up and clung nervously to her. Her voice was strange and hollow as she exclaimed,—

"Oh, Mrs. Warner, he is dying! Yes, he is dying! Mr. Dalton says so, and I know it."

"But surely the doctor cannot be certain of this. It is in God's hands; and as long as there is life there is hope. Calm yourself, do, and tell me how I can help you in your great sorrow."

Margaret's words and manner soothed Gertrude for the moment, and recalled her to herself. She sat down once more, burying her face in her hands, and muttered—

"How kind of you to come! I have no friends —no one to help me; everybody has forsaken me!"

"Then I hope you will let me remain as long as I can be of any use to you. Where is your poor husband—is he alone?"

"Yes; the doctor said he must be kept perfectly quiet. We can do nothing for him; he doesn't

know me! Oh dear, oh dear! and I've been so unkind to him—so cruel! he will never say he forgives me!"

She wrung her hands in agony and despair. Margaret spoke hopefully and soothingly to the poor distracted wife, and then went up-stairs. She felt it was not wise to leave Mr. Winslade alone, however unconscious he might be. As she left the room, she cast her eye on the young woman who answered to the name of Jessie, and, to her surprise, recognised her own discharged servant, now installed as nurse-maid at The Elms. Margaret was on the point of speaking to her, but Jessie turned abruptly, and stood with her back to her; so she said nothing, and hurried on into the chamber of suffering.

The room was partly darkened, but not sufficiently so to hide any object in it. Mr. Winslade's large, powerful form lay stretched upon the bed, his eyes closed, and a deadly paleness settled in his dark, swarthy face. Now and then a faint moan escaped from him, but, otherwise, he was still and motionless. He was scarcely covered by a shawl and cloak which had been hurriedly thrown over him, and portions of his pink hunting coat appeared beneath them.

Strewn about the room were articles of his dress —his necktie, his black velvet hunting-cap and top-boots; and, as Margaret stopped still an instant to collect her troubled thoughts, and consider what was

the best thing to do, the first pale streaks of the moon poured in through the half-closed shutters, and lit up with their cheerless light the scene of desolation.

I suppose no one is proof against those strange, unaccountable impressions which are oftentimes caused by the most trifling outer circumstance. Who does not experience a sudden thrill of pleasure from the bright blaze which follows upon stirring a fire, or on entering a well-arranged room? The glorious sunshine, too, pours cheerfulness for the most part into the gloomiest heart, while a dull fog, a ceaseless rain, or a comfortless fireside, shed their chilling influence in some degree over all men. Thus it was, that this stream of cold moonlight, creeping silently over the sick-room, caused Margaret to shudder inwardly, and raised up sad and dreary forebodings into her hopeful mind, which, for the moment, paralyzed her nerve.

She had not stood long in this painful reverie, before she heard footsteps, and, to her exceeding relief, her husband and Mr. Dalton came up. Gertrude followed, creeping timidly behind them, half choked with sobs.

The doctor glanced around, and said, almost sharply, to her—

"Why, I told you to get him undressed and put to bed."

"Yes," said Gertrude, through her tears, "we tried, but he groaned so terribly, I had not the heart to go on."

"Well, it must be done, and directly, too; if you cannot do it, somebody must."

Margaret whispered, "I will see to it; she is in no state to attend to him, it would be best for her to leave the room."

Indeed, her presence at this moment was most undesirable. Winslade, owing to the noise around him, had roused to greater consciousness; and, as Gertrude had no control over her feelings, Margaret gently led her away down-stairs, where the children still rioted, without any attempt at interference on Jessie's part.

She took the elder boy by the arm quietly but firmly, and said—

"Your father is very ill—very ill indeed, James. Have you heard what the doctor says?"

"Ay—that we ain't to kick up such a row."

"Then why are you and your sister and brothers doing the very thing he forbids?"

The children ceased their play for an instant, and looked at her without answering. Margaret repeated the question, but no answer came.

"Would any of you," she said, "like to do something useful and kind?"

"Ye—s," drawled James, hanging down his

head, while he still continued to cast wistful glances towards the puppies who were crawling away out of his brother's lap. "Well then, come here, and I will show you how you may be of use, instead of adding to the trouble and confusion."

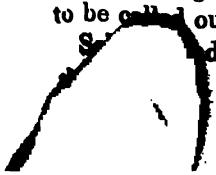
"Oh, dear!" said Gertrude, piteously, "they can do nothing; they had better go to bed. But they have had no supper. Jessie, tell cook she must get their supper directly."

Jessie went out to give the order, and Margaret whispered something to James, who slowly and awkwardly seized hold of the puppies and prepared to carry them out of the room, followed by his brothers.

Margaret then took hold of the little girl's hand, and led her up to her mother.

"There is something for you to do also, Gertie. Won't you comfort poor mamma? See how sad she is. Don't you think the love of her own little child will soothe her?"

The mother had caught these words, spoken so softly and tenderly, and stretched out her arm, without raising her head. No more was required: the child sprang into her arms, and clung round her neck with a gush of childish love, which needed only to be called out to show itself in all its fulness.



Soothed little Gertrude nestled on her mother's lap, for seldom had Mrs. Winslade sought

comfort in the love of her children. She had hitherto looked upon them in the light of anxieties and hinderances incidental to the married state; but at this moment she caught a glimpse into that secret world of love and sympathy which lies between a good parent and good children, and the glimpse calmed and hushed her aching heart.

Long did she press the little maiden in a close embrace, as if fearing it might be only a passing dream, or that the cold, sad world without might come again with its icy hand between her and her newly-found source of joy.

But little Gertrude seemed in no hurry to leave her mother; and Margaret went away, bidding her "take great care of mamma," which order was responded to by a nod of assurance from the child, who felt pleased, as all children do, to find herself in a position of some responsibility; and the soft, round arms were again tightly pressed about her mother's neck.

As Margaret shut the door she could hear her saying, coaxingly, "Please stop crying, dear mamma, we won't make any noise now."

CHAPTER VI.

"My Father, it is dark. Child, take My hand—
Cling close to me; I'll lead thee through the land;
Trust My All-seeing care; so shalt thou stand
'Midst glory bright above."

"I ask Thee for a thoughtful love
Through constant watching; wise,
To meet the glad with joyful smiles,
And to wipe the weeping eyes;
And a heart at leisure from itself
To soothe and sympathize."

A. L. W.

CHAPTER VI.

A FEW hours later, comparative stillness had crept over the house of mourning.

Gertrude had been persuaded to go and lie down, the children and servants were in bed, and Margaret had with some difficulty urged her husband to return home for the night, and leave her in charge of the poor invalid till morning.

Winslade was now undressed, and laid more comfortably in his bed. Things around him were neater, and the room wore a pleasanter aspect, while the fire which flickered in the grate gave an air of comfort to it which was widely different to its previous state. This alteration had only been arrived at by continued work on the part of Margaret, for Jessie was surly and unwilling, and of so little use, that the office of attending on poor Winslade had been shared by Philip and his wife. He still remained unconscious, groaning from time to time as if suffering from acute pain, but never speaking.

The doctor had left strict orders with Margaret

how she was to act according to the various symptoms which might arise, and after all things were settled for the night, she threw on a warm shawl, and seated herself in an arm-chair beside the sick man's bed. It was too dark to read, and she was not sorry for that. The day had been one of such unusual incident—so confused and anxious—that she was thankful for a quiet time, in which to ponder over the events of the last six hours, and to pour her care into the ear of One who never slumbers or sleeps.

She did not think of herself alone in this noiseless hour, but interceded earnestly for those who prayed not for themselves,—for the strong man who lay helpless beside her, tasting the bitterness of death; for the sorrowing wife, for the light-hearted children, and for Jessie too; while the tenderest and deepest prayers rose up from that darkened room for Philip, her dearest earthly blessing. Hour by hour flew quickly on, and Margaret wondered she was not weary as the regular ticking of the great clock on the stairs marked the flight of time. Twelve, one, and then two struck; still she kept watching. She had never before sat up through the livelong night, or fancied how peaceful these still, quiet hours can be to one who fears no ill, who dwells under the shadow of the Almighty.

Winslade ceased moaning—he lay calm and

deathlike, and Margaret dared not move, uncertain whether he were asleep or awake; but she sat with her hands clasped, watching him from time to time with an expression of solemn awe upon her face.

Three o'clock struck—then her eyes began to grow weary; she closed them, and gradually lost the remembrance of things around. It seemed to her as if she was following a glorious and bright Being along a narrow, difficult path, strewn with rocks and teeming with living things fearful to look upon. As she travelled on with a trembling heart, the glorious Being turned round upon her, and, with a look of unspeakable love, placed in her arms a little sleeping infant, saying to her, "I give you this child. He is your own, and one day I shall claim him again; will you nurse him for Me?"

She gazed at the babe in a rapture of delight; but her eye fell on the dangers all around,—the hissing snakes, the lurking beasts of prey, and the sharp rocks;—her heart sank. She called imploringly for the glorious Being once more, and found herself borne towards Him by an irresistible force, the infant still lying clasped to her bosom. Higher and higher she rose into the clear blue heavens. When she looked down in search of the rugged path, it had vanished; all—all had passed

away, and she found herself lost in an ocean of joy and rest.

Her face was wet with tears when she awoke, and it was some minutes before she could at all realize where or in what state she was. Her eye wandered round the half-lighted room, and rested almost vacantly on a white figure standing motionless at the foot of the bed.

Margaret rubbed her eyes, and dismissing all fancies about ghosts and preternatural apparitions, arose, walked up to the figure, laid her hand on its shoulder, and looked into the pale face. It was Gertrude, but so altered that Margaret hardly recognised her.

"What is the matter? Could not you sleep?" she whispered.

"Me sleep! I shall never sleep again,—it is impossible—impossible! Has he forgiven me?" she exclaimed.

Then she lowered her voice,—

"I made him miserable! I made his home miserable; so he hated me, and took to bad ways. Now he never can forgive me—never! never!"

Gertrude laughed long and loud, and Margaret saw that her mind was quite unhinged.

She put her arm round her waist and drew her away, for it was evident that the sight of her hus-

band increased the delirium. Then Gertrude became quieter, and submitted to be led back to her room, where Margaret laid her down upon the bed, and taking hold of her hand, bent over her.

At such a moment human argument or human words of comfort were vain, but not so the words of the Lord Jesus; and Margaret spoke softly in her ear the blessed invitation of Him who bore our griefs and carried our sorrows,—

"'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'"

"Rest!" muttered Gertrude; "who can give me rest? I have never found any one who could give me rest.'"

"The Lord Jesus can," said Margaret: "'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you—rest.'"

Gertrude did not speak; while for the third time Margaret slowly and solemnly repeated the blessed words, then sank down upon her knees.

The painful expression on the sufferer's face was somewhat relaxed, and she closed her eyes like a weary child, muttering, "Rest! rest!"

There was a long pause, and then Margaret whispered, "Our Saviour can give you rest—none else. He has said, 'Him that cometh unto Me, I will in nowise cast out.'"

It was doubtful whether Gertrude heard or un-

derstood; she had sunk into a restless, delirious sleep.

Margaret was awe-stricken at this fresh calamity. Gertrude's haggard looks and excited state were symptomatic of some strong illness, brought on by the sudden shock of her husband's accident, and by remorse of mind. She had hoped that little Gertrude's love might have composed her mother; but her nerves were too much shaken to admit of any but a temporary alleviation, and Margaret's heart sank within her when she contemplated the overwhelming responsibility thus suddenly laid upon her. If only Philip were by her side, she thought, or even one trustworthy servant,—nay, the veriest stranger would have been welcome at such a moment, for her courage was giving way, and, alone as she was, she could not hold out much longer against this complication of misfortunes. She prepared to go in search of Jessie, and, to her great astonishment, found her dressed and standing watching outside the door. She had evidently been there for several minutes, and her voice faltered as she said,—

"I wish I might help you, ma'am."

"Indeed you can do so, Jessie; I was just going to call you up. Your mistress is seriously ill, and must not be left alone. Will you remain with her until I return?"

"I will, ma'am."

Yet she made no sign of obeying Mrs. Warner; and although the light was too dim for Margaret to see her face, yet she had an intuitive feeling that Jessie wished to say something more.

After a moment's pause she turned to go, but Jessie's hand clutched her dress, and she said,—

"Will you forgive me? I am very sorry."

"I do forgive you, Jessie, and I only hope you will become a faithful servant."

"I will try,—I will indeed, ma'am; and then if I do better, and when master and mistress are well again, may I go back to you? It would be a deal happier to me than here, or anywhere; for I've taken on so since that day you gave me warning."

"I can't talk about this now, Jessie; we have enough to do to meet the sorrow that is around us. Let us try and fulfil our duty in the present, and leave the future to God."

"Yes, ma'am; and I mean to do my best, I promise you. I hope you forgive me, even if you won't have me back."

"That I do, from my heart."

"Thank you kindly for those words," was Jessie's answer, earnestly spoken; and she went to her post in Gertrude's room, while Margaret walked quickly on.

The sound of well-known footsteps caught her

ear: she paused, half afraid it was her fancy, until she heard Philip's voice exclaiming, "You shall not persuade me to go away another night, Margaret, not even to please you: it is no use. We must come and take a room here if need be. I knew it would be so. What a fool I was to leave you! Why, you look as pale as a ghost. But you shall do no more night work, I can tell you. I won't see you ill for anybody. How is Winslade?"

Margaret told him all that had happened since he left her, and his face grew more and more grave, sad, and uneasy. It seemed as if every thought was concentrated in his wife. Again and again he looked at her with a troubled and doubtful expression, which almost made her smile.

"Do not look so miserable, Philip; I can assure you I am not tired now you are come. I feel perfectly fresh again. But I can see we must get further help, Mrs. Winslade is so ill; and I want you to go to Martha Wilks, and ask if she would undertake the care of Mr. Winslade. We must have a person near him of thought and experience, in whom to place confidence. Then Jessie and I——"

"Not you, Maggie," said Philip, decidedly; "I positively forbid your attempting any more of the nursing, it is absolutely beyond your strength."

"When Martha comes I will do exactly as you

like; but surely you would not urge me to leave the poor Winslades just now, with no one to care for either of them?"

"Certainly not; Martha will soon be here, and then Jessie—you tell me she is likely to be more trustworthy—she can see that her master and mistress are cared for."

Margaret looked doubtful, and still urged the comfort it would be to her if she could see Martha installed at The Elms before she went home; and to this Philip at last agreed, saying, as he took up his hat,—

"Shall you object to having the children at the Manor just for the present, while their parents are so ill?"

"Oh, no. What a good thought! just like you, Philip."

CHAPTER VII.

"Poor indeed thou must be, if around thee
Thou no ray of light and love canst throw;
If no silken cord of love hath bound thee
To some little world, through weal or woe.

"If no dear eyes thy fond love can brighten,
No fond voices answer to thine own;
If no brother's sorrow thou canst lighten
By daily sympathy and gentle tone."

Anon.

CHAPTER VII.

Mrs. Carter Smith was seated in her pretty drawing-room at Ellaston, attentively copying on fine canvass an elaborate Berlin pattern, representing an Arab, with black moustaches and beard, clothed in blue, a red sash round his waist, and a variegated turban on his head. He was seated uncomfortably on a mouse-coloured horse, apparently in the act of fiercely resisting some unseen enemy with the long spear which he held in his hand.

It was an intricate and complicated piece of work, and she was much engrossed in the employment, and seemed to find great interest as well as amusement in it. The Arab's beard was "coming out" rapidly as Mrs. Carter Smith leant back an instant to take a more distant view of the effect produced. She was considered to be a beautiful worker by the ladies of her acquaintance, and the dainty little crochet purses, bead mats, and embroidered collars which she presented from time to time to her intimate acquaintances, elicited raptures of admiration

from them. Simpler work—such as frocks, shirts, jackets, or petticoats and the like, for the poor—Mrs. Carter Smith despised; and she laughed at the infatuation which had seized upon several well-disposed middle-aged ladies in the town to use their fingers for the purpose of helping to clothe the fatherless and the widow.

Mrs. Carter Smith's employment was by-and-bye interrupted by a ring at the door-bell, and the entrance of the stout, emphatic little doctor, Mr. Dalton.

A man he was of great medical experience, and rather dogmatic, as is not unfrequently the case with short people. Now Mr. Dalton was allowed a degree of tongue-licence accorded to few others, and this by universal consent. The Ellaston world had long had experience of his real excellence and kindliness of heart, and they always stroked down his little roughnesses of phraseology to new-comers by the satisfactory assurance, that "his bark was worse than his bite."

He was in the habit of attending Mrs. Carter Smith for headaches; but the visits were, usually speaking, an interchange of gossip, or a discussion upon irrelevant subjects; so it was to-day. After the ordinary greeting and inquiries into symptoms, Mrs. Carter Smith asked, in a sympathizing voice,

"How are the poor Winslades?"

"Winslade may be called slightly better; his wife is in a brain-fever, and lies hovering between life and death; but I know she is a friend of yours," said the little man, turning sharp round upon her with a twinkle in his eye, "and probably you know as much about her as I do."

"Ah, yes—poor thing! I wanted to be of some use to her, but the fever frightened me. I felt that it would be absolutely wrong to run into danger, not only on my own account, but on Mr. Carter Smith's too, he is so very susceptible."

"'Em—ah—it is well everybody is not susceptible. I suppose you know that Warner and his wife have been backwards and forwards at The Elms ever since the day of the accident."

"Really! How extremely kind! I should be afraid, though, that it would be rather too much for the poor invalids; in such cases, quiet is so very essential and desirable; and Mrs. Winslade is but slightly acquainted with Margaret Warner."

"Indeed!" the doctor mused; "'Em—I didn't know that. Well, give me such friends as those two when I am ill, that's all. They have got a heart in them. If ever I met a kind woman, it is Warner's wife."

"Her father was a great invalid, I believe, for years; and, possibly, she learnt how to manage sick people at that time. It is a useful knowledge for

those who have a taste that way, but I should never have nerve for it."

"Dear me, Mrs. Smith," said the little man, eagerly, without heeding her remark, "I wish you could have seen her, as I have done, watching as tenderly over Mrs. Winslade as if she had been her own sister; never thinking for an instant about herself, and behaving for all the world like an angel. I wish there were more women in the world such as she is, what good they would do, to be sure!"

Mrs. Carter Smith smiled sarcastically, and became absorbed in the Arab's beard, leaving Mr. Dalton's enthusiasm to cool down, and the topic to drop.

"You have not told me any news! Is there nothing stirring in the neighbourhood?" she said, after a time, and in a fresh tone of voice, as if to commence a different subject.

"Perhaps you have not heard," he continued, pertinaciously, "that the four children at The Elms are now at Colwall Manor Farm. Warner took them to his own house directly their parents fell ill, and there they remain for the present."

"What a nice arrangement!" exclaimed Mrs. Carter Smith; "I shall hope to call and inquire at The Elms in the course of a day or two, if there is no fear of infection."

"Infection!—in brain fever, and outside the front door! Well, I confess I should be rather afraid;

it would be so like tempting Providence to go; and you would never forgive yourself if either you or your husband caught the fever!" The little doctor glanced maliciously at Mrs. Carter Smith. "No, I should advise you not to run such a risk; and you can make your mind perfectly easy about your friend; she is well cared for by as good a Samaritan as ever trod the earth. I hope, John Dalton, you have learnt a lesson from her which you will not soon forget;" and he clapped his hand on his broad expanse of chest with great emphasis.

Mrs. Carter Smith darted at him a look of ineffable scorn, but he did not perceive it, for he was employed in dragging out of the depths of his fob a large mediæval watch, connected, by a gold chain, with a couple of his grandfather's seals. He looked for a moment at its smooth shining face, and then said, abruptly,—

"Good morning, Mrs. Smith; I have plenty of doctoring to do before night, and must husband my time. I will call again next week."

He marched out of the room, utterly indifferent to Mrs. Carter Smith's scarlet face of indignation, and frigid shake of the hand.

Mr. Dalton was an odd man; very quick in detecting failings in character or motives, and equally quick in blurting out his opinions about them, without

any smoothing or softening influence. This system of correction was received variously by his various friends and patients. Some he mortally affronted,—though, to say the truth, these were few,—some he estranged for a time, and many he won to himself by his very straightforward championship in the cause of what was honest, right, and kind. They forgave him heartily if he did sometimes thrust his finger into their darling sin, and drag it out to light, for it taught them to know themselves, and respect him.

As he walked briskly away from No. 7 to visit another patient, he passed the "Green Dragon," before which the Hereford mail stood, ready-loaded. The coach was on the point of starting. A group of idle men and boys were standing around, watching and criticising, and the Boots of the inn was in the act of helping a gentleman on to the box-seat. Mr. Dalton chanced to cast his eyes on him as he passed, and saw the long, sharp face of Carter Smith. He stopped.

"How do you do, Smith? Why, where on earth are you off to?"

Carter Smith looked confused, but instantly recovered himself:—

"I'm obliged to go up to town on business—very urgent business; rather unfortunate, as it happens, for I have plenty of work at home just now; how-

ever, it cannot be helped. I say, Dalton, would you step up to No. 7, and tell Mrs. Carter Smith I shall not be able to return till next week?"

The coachman jumped on the box, gathered up the reins. "All right, sir?"

"All right," said Carter Smith. "Good-by, Dalton!" He waved his hand, the horn blew, and away went the "Regulator," with its strong team of four horses, leaving Mr. Dalton with the affirmative answer scarcely parted from his lips.

Time was precious to him that afternoon, for he had an extra number of sick on his usually long roll; but he eschewed grumbling, and posted back to divulge the news to Mrs. Carter Smith.

She was in her drawing-room, as before, but was, at the moment, engaged in conversation with some caller, and received Mr. Dalton's second visit with haughty coldness. He sat himself down, however, on a chair by the window, with an air of dogged resolution, and waited for five minutes, during which time Mrs. Carter Smith appeared not to notice his presence. When the lady left, Mrs. Carter Smith lingered at the door, in hopes of devising some plan to release herself of the doctor; but he came forward—

"Mrs. Smith, your husband asked me to tell you that he is gone by the coach up to town, and will not return till next week."

She looked surprised and uncomfortable.

"Are you aware what calls him away so suddenly?" she coldly inquired.

"Business—urgent business; and business calls me away too. I should not have intruded my unwelcome presence on you again, had it not been to deliver this message."

She offered him two fingers to shake, thanked him formally for his kindness, and he then left, muttering, while he ran down-stairs two steps at a time, "Take warning, John Dalton, don't you go and marry a proud woman; no, nor a silly one, either. Matilda Smith must be an unpleasant companion for life; 'favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain,' saith the preacher, 'but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.'"

CHAPTER VIII.

"Who is my neighbour? Do I ask?
The answer is in every task
Of love that, on the common way
Of life, lies round us day by day.

Whatever fellow-man can plead
The brotherhood of grief, or need,
The Christian's heart admits the call—
He is the neighbour of us all."

Spiritual Songs.

CHAPTER VIII.

EVERYTHING at The Elms continued much the same. Mr. Dalton not unfrequently stayed the night there in order to satisfy Margaret, and so that he might be at hand if Mrs. Winslade's symptoms should grow suddenly worse. Yet it seemed as if this scarcely could be, for the fever raged at its greatest height, and she lay utterly unconscious of everything and everybody. Her husband, meanwhile, was out of danger, though Mr. Dalton shook his head when Margaret said, hopefully, "I trust we may see him quite well again before long."

"I doubt it," was his answer.

She herself had some misgivings, too, when she looked at the change which had passed over him in so short a time. His bright, robust colouring, had merged into a pale, sickly shade, and the strongly-marked features were now sharpened and drawn by suffering. His strength, on which he so much prided himself, was gone. He could not move without acute pain, and was helpless as a child.

Philip came to sit by him in the evenings, when his work was done. He feared to talk much, and the sick man did not encourage it; yet he always stretched out his hand in friendly welcome when Warner entered, and appeared glad to see him.

Philip noticed that whenever Margaret's soft step and rustling dress was heard, he invariably turned round—sometimes almost sharply—and, after ascertaining who it was, laid his head rather wearily on his pillow, not unfrequently with a sigh.

One day, after this uneasy movement, Winslade fixed his eyes with an expression of some anxiety on Philip, without speaking.

"I should like to know what is on your mind, Winslade, if you have a wish to tell me."

"Nothing, thank you." He closed his eyes again to avoid further conversation.

By-and-bye Margaret looked in, and, thinking he was asleep, said, in an under-tone,—

"Mr. Dalton is here. I am afraid she is much worse."

The sick man started, and said, in a voice which pierced them to the heart,—

"Gertrude? is it Gertrude who is worse?"

Then it all came out. Philip told him she was alarmingly ill; not merely unwell, as he had thought her. He revealed their deep anxiety about her in kind and sympathizing words. Winslade listened silently;

then he buried his face in the pillow. There was a long pause, during which time years of neglect and selfishness came rushing as a whirlpool over the sick man's conscience. Now and then a suppressed sigh or groan revealed the storm which was buffeting him from within; otherwise, he was still. Philip longed to comfort him, but thought, on the whole, it was best to leave him to himself until he spoke of his own accord. So the hours wore on. Margaret's step was again heard, and then Mr. Winslade roused.

"Is she worse?" he asked.

"No, not at all," said Margaret, gently approaching nearer.

"Does Dalton think there is any hope? Do not deceive me, please."

He spoke sternly. Margaret was sadly puzzled; the more so, because Winslade was looking at her fixedly. She kept silence, and cast an imploring glance towards her husband.

"I would rather you told me the truth," said Winslade, coldly and decidedly.

"He fears more than he hopes," Margaret answered, with effort.

Winslade put his hand over his face and muttered, "Will you leave me? I must be alone."

With looks of the intensest sorrow and sympathy they left him, and closed the door.

Margaret burst into tears.

"Philip, how dreadful it is to see such grief as this, and yet to feel we cannot soothe it!"

"If we cannot, there is *One* who can," said Philip, solemnly.

"Yes, indeed!" she sighed; "I hardly thought he would have felt her illness so deeply; but Mr. Dalton told me he loved her dearly when first they married, and thought his home would be the happiest in the world: but oh, Philip, how very few people seem to be thoroughly united after they have been some time married! I wonder why it is?"

There was a ring at the door-bell, and Margaret exclaimed—

"This is Mr. Willoughby; I am so thankful! I thought he would come again this afternoon."

Philip hastened down and met the clergyman with a respectful but hearty shake of the hand, as he entered the house.

No wonder the Warners rejoiced at his coming. His appearance was an index of his character. The very sight of his dignified form, and calm, expressive face were refreshing, and seemed to shed a soothing, quieting influence around.

Margaret knew him now by a deeper experience; she had found in him a counsellor and minister in sacred things; a comforter and supporter in time of anxiety. He had taught her more of the love of her

Saviour, and led her nearer to Him, and she often described him as an "Epistle known and read of all men." He seemed to carry his commission as servant of the Most High God clearly stamped on every word and action of his life.

Mr. Willoughby went up to see Gertrude, followed by the Warners. Mr. Dalton was standing near the door when they entered, and, in answer to the clergyman's question, he merely said,—

"There is nothing more to be done, sir;" then, turning to Margaret, "I remain here to-night, so I hope you will go home. Martha sits up with her."

Margaret shuddered. It was not that she feared death in itself, but she thought how terrible it was to encounter it as poor Gertrude must.

All stood silent in the sick-room for some minutes, wrapped in solemn thoughts, and interrupted only by the restless movements of the poor suffering one.

Then Mr. Willoughby said, in a deep, earnest voice, "Let us pray."

* * * * *
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That night Mr. Willoughby insisted on making them all return to their homes—the Warners and Mr. Dalton. He was well accustomed to sit up at night, he said, and had no wife or children at home to think of.

As they bid him good bye, gratefully and respectfully, he took Margaret's hand, with a peculiar expression of interest on his face, and said,—

"God bless you, and reward you, for your work and labour of love. Do you remember our Saviour's words? 'I was sick, and ye visited *Me?*'"

CHAPTER IX.

"THIS life is but a school-time,
In which we learn to love
The friends we see around us,—
The unseen God above.

"Some learn by active service,
Others in grief and pain;
Some seem to reap in gladness,
The rest to toil in vain."

The Name of Jesus.

CHAPTER IX.

NEXT morning, at early dawn, Margaret was seen walking across the grass fields between the Manor Farm and The Elms.

She was not alone. Little Gertrude had begged so earnestly she might go and see "poor Mamma," that Margaret could not resist taking her. She had often been obliged to refuse the little girl's petition, and leave her behind when she went to visit her parents, though each time the childish request was put more earnestly; so this morning she consented, and Gertie tripped joyously by Margaret's side, now talking of what she should do when she saw her mother, now running off to pick the wild clematis, which hung in grey masses on the dull brown hedge, or the bright scarlet berries all wet with hoar-frost, and whispering to herself, as she made up a tiny bunch, "Mamma likes flowers; this is for mamma." Margaret could not bear to check her, or damp the little care-free heart; but she gently warned her to be very still and silent when she got to The Elms, and tried to explain how

quiet everybody was there, so as not to disturb her father or mother.

Little Gertrude listened, and promised, and walked for some distance quite gravely by Margaret's side; but the next tuft of brilliant berries gleaming in the sunlight dispersed all sad thoughts; she laughed and chattered as before.

How great was the contrast between her merry, sparkling face, and the serious, anxious look of Margaret! How did the latter strain her eyes towards the window of Gertrude's room, in hopes of catching some glimpse of what was passing within!

She hurried on, with the little girl by her side, whose busy tongue was now asking innumerable questions which Margaret could not answer. A few steps more, and they had reached the garden-gate, when Mr. Willoughby, who had seen them walking towards the house, met them.

Margaret looked anxiously into his face; she tried to read in its expression an answer to the question which lay so heavily on her mind. No sign of violent emotion was to be traced there. He always seemed grave and thoughtful; but his manner was more than usually subdued and tender, and he kept little Gertrude's hand in his as he led them to the house.

Margaret asked, in a half-audible whisper, "How is she, sir?"

He made no answer until they had entered and sat

down; then he drew the child towards him, he placed his arm around her, and said, turning to Margaret,—

"" It is over now. She passed away at five o'clock this morning; and, for some hours before, she was slightly conscious." He sighed deeply as he added, "If it had been the will of God, I wish she might have lived a little longer; but He knows best."

The child hardly understood distinctly the meaning of Mr. Willoughby's words; she saw they meant something very sad from the expression on Margaret's face, so she wept, and asked—

" Isn't dear mamma better?"

" My child," said Mr. Willoughby, " your mother has gone away from this world. She died this morning. It was not the will of God that Mr. Dalton's medicines should make her well again; and we know that everything He does is full of love, though it may make us feel sad at first."

" Then I can't give her these flowers: see what a pretty nosegay I picked, and she likes wild-flowers so much. Mrs. Warner said I might go to her this morning; and I wanted so to tell her how much kinder James is now, and how happy we are at Colwall, and a great many other things: but will she never speak to me again?"

Mr. Willoughby answered the question by placing the child in Margaret's arms, who clasped her to her

heart, and secretly determined, by God's help, to watch over her and her brothers.

"You won't go away too, Mrs. Warner, will you?" said little Gertrude, looking up anxiously at her through her tears.

"No, dear, I think not."

"I should be so very unhappy if you left me." She flung her arms round Margaret's neck, hiding her face on her bosom. "Though I know I can't always stay with you,—Jessie says so."

"We need not think about your going away from me, darling; when you do, it will be to come here again, and help to nurse papa and make him happy. I am sure you will like that."

The child said nothing, but pressed her curly head closer against Margaret.

"Shall you not, darling?"

"Papa doesn't love me,—he never did."

"You must not say this, Gertie; it is not right. If you are a good and obedient little girl, he is certain to love you."

"But, indeed, he used to beat us sometimes, and speak very unkindly to us; and then mamma used to cry, and speak angrily to papa."

"Perhaps you and your brothers were naughty then, and disobedient; but now that you are older, and know how wrong it is to do such things, papa

will not have reason to punish you. Remember, darling, the sentence which I wrote for you, and which is pinned up in your bedroom at the Manor Farm. Can you tell it me?"

"'Bear and forbear.'"

"What did I tell you that meant, Gertie?"

"That we must bear meekly any unkind words people say to us, or any unkind things they may do to us; because Jesus says we must, and He showed us how."

"And what does 'forbear' mean?"

"That we must try and never speak angry words to anybody, nor do unkind actions. Mrs. Warner, do you know James says that over to himself when I want to take his spade and work in my garden which you gave me; and then he lets me have it, though I know he doesn't like to, for he is so fond of digging himself, and I don't mean to ask him for it again. Oh! what will he say when he hears about dear mamma?"

"I am sure it will make him very sad, Gertie; you must try to comfort him. But now I must leave you, dear child; you can remain here for a short time."

Little Gertrude put up her face to be kissed, and promised she would stop where she was till Mrs. Warner returned.

When Margaret went up-stairs she found Mr.

Willoughby coming out of poor Winslade's room. He had broken the sad news to him, he had prayed beside him; but the iron had entered into the sick man's soul, and for the present he refused to be comforted.

Mr. Willoughby wished much to stay, but other parochial duties awaited him at Ellaston; he therefore asked Margaret if it would be possible for her to remain at The Elms.

"Yes, Sir, I can do so easily; for Philip said when he went out this morning, that he was going to Kingscroft Fair, and could not at all tell what time he would be back. It would be wrong to leave Mr. Winslade alone, especially if he cares to have any one near him."

"He did not say much; but as I was leaving he turned round and asked me if I was obliged to go, and if I would not come again in a few days. Poor fellow! I shall call early to-morrow; but there are parochial engagements which will make it impossible for me to return to-day, and I confess I should be ill at ease if I thought he was all alone on the first day of his sorrow. He will do well in your hands, Mrs. Warner; I am satisfied to leave him now."

So the good clergyman mounted his horse and rode off to his work.

He looked pale and worn after the night of mourning through which he had passed, and but

little fitted to spend the rest of the day in active occupation.

Little Gertrude went back to Colwall Manor Farm with Martha, who promised Margaret to tell the other children of their great loss, and then return to The Elms. Her gentle and kindly nursing had become almost essential to Mr. Winslade, who needed much care, owing to his perfect helplessness and inability to move without assistance.

Beyond the mere waiting on his physical wants, there was little to be done. Margaret took her work and sat with him. He did not speak much, and a few monosyllables were his only recognition of her gentle sympathy. She kept silence, remembering that the heart only knoweth its own bitterness.

Once he asked if Mr. Willoughby was expected again that day; but receiving an answer in the negative, he sank back into himself to feed on his own mournful thoughts.

At nightfall, when Margaret rose to bid him good-bye, he said,—

"I owe you a great deal. It is not because I am ungrateful that I don't thank you, God knows. The children must be a great trouble—they were to Gertrude; but I shall soon be well enough to look after them. Thank you, Mrs. Warner: good night."

There was a desolation in his tone of voice, and yet a sternness, which, though it cut her to the heart, obliged her to refrain from any expressions of commiseration beyond the merest common-place. With these she left him, to walk back to her own sunny home.

As she started from the door into the darkness, and had gained the foot-path across the grass fields which led to Colwall Manor Farm, she was suddenly startled by hearing the heavy tread of a man close behind her, and then by a momentary gleam of light from a bulls'-eye lantern thrown full upon her face. She started, and stopped still.

A gruff but familiar voice mumbled,—

"Aye, to be sure—'tis her; I thought it was. It's you, ain't it, ma'am?" said the speaker, to make quite sure.

Margaret was so bewildered for the minute that she could not attach the voice to any name, although she knew it well.

"Who are you, pray?" she asked.

"Me, ma'am? Why, Caleb Wilks, to be sure. I thought to myself, as master wasn't come home, and couldn't walk over and fetch you back, as he mostly does, as I'd make so bold. You see, it doesn't do for young women—ladies, I mean—to be a-going about alone at this time of night. But I didn't mean no offence, ma'am."

"Indeed, Caleb, I think it is exceedingly kind in you coming for me; I am very glad to have some one to light me home this dark night. Is not your master returned yet?"

"Why, no; he told me belike his business 'ud keep him out till late to-night. You see, 'tis a good step over to Kingscroft, and the road not over safe, neither; leastways, in such a fog as this. There was Farmer Grange, as got throw'd out of his gig coming back from that there fair; 'tis some years ago, now; 'twas a twist in the road and a heap of rubbish and stuff, as it might be just round the corner, and the horse took fright and fell up again it, gig and all; so there, he lost his hold, and was pitched out. Aye, 'twas a sharpish fall he had, and folks say as he's never been the same man since. Then, 'tis two years come Candlemas, as young Jones and his sisters was a driving back that there same way, and there ain't a better whip nor he in all England; but the road was too much for him; he got along all right till he came to the narrow part, where 'tis a wall on one side, and a deep ditch on the tother, and his horse fell-to kicking till he broke the shaft and dragged the phaeton. . . . . I can't exactly recollect how 'twas; but, anyhow, he was got home with his neck broke, and the girl, she was a good bit damaged too. I heard a deal of talk about it at the time, but 'tis mostly gone out of my head;

for such topics, when you are sad and heavy at heart."

"Then you know?" she said.

"Yes, some of the neighbours brought the sad news. . . . . Oh! how have I thanked God many a time this day, that I am not called to bear such a trial as poor Winslade."

CHAPTER X.

"HIDDEN close from human eye,
Violets do love to lie;
Only for the tell-tale air,
No one could discover where:
But there's an Eye which on them dwells,
With sunshine soft and true;
A Hand which fills their purple bells
With drops of morning dew."

Spiritual Songs.

CHAPTER X.

CARTER SMITH returned to Ellaston late at night, after a fortnight's absence.

Strange and disjointed stories soon floated about in the gossiping little town, originating chiefly from his own servants. They declared that something strange had come over "master" ever since his visit to London; that he had grown very irritable; that he sat up writing the greater part of the night, or pacing up and down his room for hours together.

These remarks met with ready and eager listeners, who added thereto additional surmises of their own, according to their various characters.

The banker suspected that Carter Smith had lost considerably in some speculation. He only grounded this opinion on a general knowledge of his character, for Carter Smith was invariably reserved upon his own affairs.

The tradespeople said they had foreseen his ruin years ago, for he never paid their Christmas bills till

Midsummer, but how or where the money had gone they did not care to guess.

Mrs. Carter Smith's intimate friends laid the blame on her, for her lavish expenditure in dress; and so people wondered and gossiped, although, to all appearances, things went on as usual at No. 7, beyond the great fact that Mr. Carter Smith was selling his horse and carriage, and had given warning to his groom. But he worked at his office, and his wife visited her friends, and looked as pleasant and agreeable as she ever did; so that no fresh news could be gathered from watching them.

Thus things went on for the next six months, during which time Mr. Winslade's two youngest children remained under Margaret's care, while he himself still lay wearily upon a bed of suffering. The *quidnuncs* of Ellaston were then again plunged into a sea of conjecture by a paragraph in the advertisement-sheet of the "Times," which ran thus:—

"A married lady, residing in a commodious and elegant house, in the beautiful town of Ellaston, is desirous of meeting with a single or a widow lady, who should act as her companion, and assist in a few light domestic duties. All the advantages of a luxurious home guaranteed. For terms and further particulars, apply to Mrs. Carter Smith, Ellaston, Herefordshire."

Here was, indeed, food for speculation; and when,

at length, after several letters, which were known to have passed between Mrs. Carter Smith and some inquiring correspondent, the coach one evening brought to Ellaston a tall, pale-looking person, dressed in deep mourning, who was met by Mr. Carter Smith, the curiosity of Ellaston was aroused to a painful degree. If news had been brought of a French invasion, or a war with America, it could hardly have created so deep and universal a sensation as the arrival of this unconscious stranger.

Inquisitive idlers determined to ascertain who the individual could be, and sounded Mr. Carter Smith's servants on the point. They were as ignorant as the rest of the world upon the subject, and only had a notion that her name was M'Donald, and that the establishment was to be reduced in consequence of her arrival.

Mr. Willoughby noticed the sad expressive face of this new-comer in church the next Sunday, and took an early opportunity of making acquaintance with her.

He soon called at No. 7, where he was ever a most unwelcome visitor, and, to his secret relief, found Mrs. Carter Smith gone out, and the melancholy stranger sitting at a table, almost mechanically mending an old pair of black gloves.

There was something about her which a good deal

struck Mr. Willoughby, and her face seemed familiar to him. He fancied he had seen her before; but, although he reviewed many a bygone year, and many a chance acquaintance, in hopes of obtaining a solution of his perplexity, yet he was wholly unable to do so.

The new-comer was reserved, as well as grave. She met the genial kindness of Mr. Willoughby, and his inquiries about her and her interests, with grateful looks, but few words. Yet he left her with his interest highly excited, and, on the whole, favourably impressed with her.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Carter Smith rearranged her household, on what she called a "war footing;" she discharged the second maid-servant; and then, having made the discovery of her companion's gentle, uncomplaining temperament, she gradually increased the stipulated "light domestic duties," from keeping her own and the house linen well mended, to superintending the maid-of-all-work, and assisting where any help was required. To all this Mrs. M'Donald, as she was called, lent her hand willingly and efficiently, but with so sad and depressed a face, that Mrs. Carter Smith oftentimes grew impatient, and taunted her with her demure looks, and her mournful, dingy clothing.

The more patiently Mrs. M'Donald bore these annoyances, the more they were thrust upon her;

and it was plain to the most casual observer that her life was no bed of roses.

One day Mr. Dalton called, as was his wont, to pay a professional visit on Mrs. Carter Smith. He was shown up-stairs, and felt himself rather perplexed when he found himself alone in the room with her companion. He had not anticipated a *tête-à-tête* with her, and felt considerably abashed when she gravely, and almost proudly asked him if he wanted her.

He stammered out something about Mrs. Carter Smith, and then added that he was glad of this opportunity of paying his respects to her, hoping he had not interrupted her in any occupation.

She merely said, "It is of no consequence, thank you."

The doctor remarked upon the weather; under cover of which subject he tried to prepare another topic of conversation.

Then he spoke of the scenery—of the beauty of the Malvern hills—the healthiness of the locality; after which there was an awkward pause.

Mrs. M'Donald only answered by monosyllables, and did not suggest any fresh ideas for discussion. Mr. Dalton fidgeted uneasily on his seat, and then looked up at her.

There was an air of suffering and abstraction in her face, which awakened a painful interest in the

doctor's mind. He had bitter thoughts of Mrs. Carter Smith, and said abruptly,—

"I am afraid the life here must seem very dull to you."

"I am as happy as I expected to be."

She almost unconsciously glanced at the plain gold ring upon her slender finger, which now, for the first time, attracted the doctor's notice. He thought to himself—

"She is married, then. A widow, perhaps. Or worse; her husband may be an inhuman monster, who has run away and left her. What a wicked world this is, to be sure!" Then aloud,—

"I hope you will, before long, become acquainted with a neighbour of yours, a Mrs. Warner; she and her husband live near Ellaston; they are related to the Carter Smiths; and I am certain you would find her a pleasant friend."

"Mr. Willoughby spoke to me about her," said Mrs. M'Donald, slightly colouring; "but he thought she was much occupied at home."

"So she was. Mr. Winslade's children were for some months under her care, and took up much of her time; indeed, the two youngest only went back to their father yesterday; so she is less engaged now. By-the-bye, do you happen to know of a good estimable person, who would do as governess for them? Mrs. Warner is looking out for one."

"Are they nice children?"

"Very,—uncommonly. They are improving every day. I only hope they'll never go back to their old ways. Mrs. Warner has taken amazing pains with them all, especially the little ones. Upon my word, she has taught them, and watched over them, ever since their poor mother's death, like a ———"

"What was her name before she married?" asked Mrs. M'Donald, who had been wrapped in a brown study ever since she had mechanically asked the former question.

The doctor looked rather surprised at the sudden interruption.

"Margaret Graham. She was the daughter of a tradesman in Birmingham; but really, more than that I cannot tell you. Her father is dead, and she seems to have no relations in the world."

Mr. Dalton did not remark the strong workings of emotion which passed over the stranger's countenance. Before he looked up wondering at her silence, and apparent lack of interest, she was sad and tranquil, as usual.

Notwithstanding the difficulty of keeping up conversation with a person who never suggested a topic, and answered as curtly as was consistent with politeness, the doctor was strongly bound to his seat. He found in Mrs. M'Donald a mysterious attraction, for which he could not account.

Perhaps his quick perception stood him in good part here; and he could detect, underlying the

silent and melancholy exterior, a woman's true and tender heart.

On taking his leave, as he rode towards The Elms, Mr. Dalton determined to try and effect a meeting between Mrs. M'Donald and Margaret Warner—so sure was he that they would suit each other,—they were so strangely alike in some things. After settling this plan in his mind, he fell into a long train of unusual thoughts, of which the prominent figure was Mrs. Carter Smith's companion.

The autumn leaves rustled and crackled beneath his horse's hoofs, as the good creature trotted along at a measured and business-like pace, carrying his abstracted master between hedgerows, garnered with hips-and-haws, while the merry-hearted birds, for whose winter use they were lovingly provided, were now chattering disdainfully amongst them, or flitting in groups over the newly-ploughed fields.

The radiant glow of an autumn sun shed glorious lights over the whole scene, and lit up the decaying foliage of elm and beech into masses of burnished gold. Yet amidst all this beauty of nature, the doctor sped on, without once glancing around. He would have passed James Winslade, too, without noticing him, had not the little fellow called out,

"How do you do, Sir?"

He was running along the lane with a dog at his heels, his younger brother beside him; and for-

tunate was it for the doctor that this incident aroused him, otherwise he might have passed The Elms gateway without being aware of it.

When he entered the house the little dining-room door was half open, and a sight greeted his eyes which made him pause on the threshold.

Winslade was stretched on a sofa, looking towards the fire, propped up with pillows, and his back turned towards the door. This was his usual position now, poor fellow. A pair of crutches were carefully placed against a corner of the sofa, ready for use; and close beside him, seated on a low stool, was the tiny form of little Gertrude.

She had got one of her father's large, thin hands safely imprisoned within her small ones, and her head rested on his arm.

She was singing to him; and no wonder the doctor paused and listened, for it was a sweet, soft voice that sang the words,—

"Here we suffer grief and pain,
Here we meet to part again;
In heaven we part no more.
Oh that will be joyful,
Joyful, joyful, joyful!
Oh that will be joyful,
When we meet to part no more!"

After she had finished she stroked her father's hand, then kissed it, and then whispered to him, "I

think that will be joyful, dear papa, when we meet in heaven to part no more. Don't you?"

Mr. Dalton wondered how Winslade's cold nature would receive these childish caresses; he scarcely breathed, for fear of making them aware of his presence.

No word was spoken, but Winslade's hand was brushed hastily across his eyes, and he said, gently, "That is a pretty song, Gertie, and I like it very much."

The little girl coloured joyfully.

"Mrs. Warner taught us another, which I will sing to-morrow, if I may—only Harry sings it better than I do."

"Mrs. Warner was very kind to you, my child."

"Yes, indeed she was, dear papa, and we were very unhappy to leave her."

Then, with that delicacy of feeling which is so beautiful in a child, she added,—

"But we were very glad to come back to you, and I am much more glad about it to-day than I was yesterday."

"Why so, Gertie?"

"I can't exactly tell you, papa."

"Think a minute, and then tell me. I should like to know."

He watched her inquisitively. She looked down,

and almost hid her face in his hand, which she still held in hers.

"Because you are so kind to us."

He drew out his hand now, and laid it gently on her curly head, but without speaking. That instant Mr. Dalton sneezed, and little Gertrude started and looked round.

"It is Mr. Dalton, papa."

He came forward to shake hands, and pay his half-medical, half-friendly visit.

It was strange that, notwithstanding the doctor's usual habit of mentioning any news that might be interesting to his patients, he carefully abstained from doing so on this occasion.

Gertrude's hymn had shed a solemn feeling over him, and he felt as if common subjects would have jarred at that time.

CHAPTER XI.

"O then I see, while seated nigh,
A mother's heart shine in thine eye;
And proud resolve and purpose meek,
Speak of thee more than words can speak!"

Allan Cunningham.

CHAPTER XI.

The chill evenings and frosty mornings had set in; the trees stood out gaunt and denuded, with scarce a vestige of their rich leafy clothing left, beyond a few solitary withered leaves which hung loosely upon them like tatters and shreds. The usually neat trim garden at the Manor Farm — Margaret's peculiar pride—lay ruffled and untidy, with its once bright flower-beds blackened by alternate sun and frost, and the dead leaves trodden into its green velvet lawn.

The outer world looked very forlorn, and the air was almost oppressive with that peculiar mixture of fog and decayed vegetation which is so noticeable on damp autumn days.

Yet at this time it was that great joy dawned on the farmer's home, and Margaret's first-born was placed in Philip's arms; he stood beside her, with his little infant—a bundle of white drapery—folded tenderly in his strong, powerful arms; and the thankful, happy mother watched them both, husband and

child, with a thrill of happiness such as none but a mother can experience. She almost longed to be for ever there in the trance of perfect earthly happiness, gazing on the tiny, half-covered form, in its utter helplessness, and then on the strange, new look upon her husband's face. He did not speak. His heartfelt, and almost passionate kiss on her forehead was full of eloquence. But his emotion was strong —too strong for words, and when he had again laid the babe by Margaret's side, he bent his knees in silent thanksgiving.

This was an hour in their lives never to be forgotten. There came with it a strong, overpowering sense of joy, as of some hidden spring of love—all different from that which had led them, one short year before, to vow before God they would strive to be thenceforth all in all to each other. A fresh spring of love, hitherto unknown, had burst forth at that moment and overflowed their hearts; not drowning their other love, but rather fertilizing it, and making it fructify.

They wondered—at least Margaret did—how it was she could have ever been without this love, since now it had become, in one short hour, a part of her very being, and had changed the whole tenour of her thoughts and feelings. No wonder that she cared not, any more than her husband did, to find words for her deep joy, though her spirit sang, "Bless the

Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His Holy Name."

Long did Philip stand gazing on his wife and child.

Margaret's fair, pale cheek was almost as white as the snowy pillow on which she lay, and her soft blue eyes were intently fixed on the little babe nestled close beside her.

"I hope we shall be like Hannah, Philip, and give our child unto the Lord all the days of her life."

"With God's help we will, and she shall be called Rachel; I know it is the name you wish, although you never told me so. It was your mother's name, and your sister's, and I like it."

Margaret turned round with a bright look of pleasure.

"Is there no other name you would like better?"

"None, except Margaret, and I have no particular wish to call you 'Old Margaret,' in contradistinction to your daughter," said Philip, smiling. "But I suppose I must go, or Martha will scold me for talking too much."

"Thank you, Philip; Rachel was the name I wished for most, only I wonder how you found it out."

"I have more wit than you give me credit for, you see."

Martha tapped, and came in.

"Please, Sir, there is a lady down-stairs who wants to speak with you."

"Who is it—do you know?"

"A tall lady, dressed in black, sir."

"A tall lady, dressed in black. I wonder who can it be?"

Philip left the room and went down to the stranger. She was seated, but rose as he entered, and looked at him with keen interest from beneath the shadow of her crape veil, then paused, as if to gather courage before addressing him.

"I was not aware, until I came here, that Mrs. Warner could not see me. I thought, however, I might speak to you instead, if you would kindly spare me a few minutes."

"Certainly," said Philip; "pray sit down." He felt a great degree of awkwardness, for he neither knew who she was, nor the cause of her visit.

In a short time she relieved his embarrassment, by going on to explain why she had called.

"A short time ago Mr. Dalton mentioned to me that Mrs. Warner was inquiring for a governess for Mr. Winslade's children, and I thought I might offer myself for the situation, subject to her approval. I am at present with Mrs. Carter Smith, but I should be much happier if I could be near children, and leading a more active life."

This explanation was given as if with difficulty, and the stranger's eyes were bent down on the black folds of her mourning dress.

"You are Mrs. M'Donald, then, I presume?"

She bowed assent.

"I am afraid I could not undertake the responsibility of talking over the matter with you, and my wife is at present unable to see any one. However, I will mention the subject to her in a few days, and then we will let you know. There must necessarily be a delay in communicating with you; I hope, therefore, that you will not, in the meantime, allow any other good opening for you which may occur, to slip by on our account. Mrs. Warner's plans for Mr. Winslade's children are as yet undecided."

The stranger rose—and hesitated.

"May I ask how she and her baby are going on?"

"Thank you—as well as possible."

Philip looked rather hurried, and his mind was evidently pre-occupied; so Mrs. M'Donald said good morning, and walked slowly back to Ellaston.

He little thought,—as he rode off to his work, radiant and joyous, with a light heart and unclouded brow,—of the solitary stranger, whose hidden sorrows and heavy burdens had eaten into her young heart, and left traces of age upon her careworn face.

Philip meant to call at The Elms on his way to an outlying point of his farm. He longed to communicate his joy to others. As he mounted his horse, Caleb's awkward salutation, and "hope the missus and the young one is well—pity it warn't a boy, sir," was hardly sufficiently congratulatory to satisfy the delighted father; he retorted, almost angrily,—

"Indeed, I like girls best, Caleb."

And the old fellow said,—

"So much the better, Sir; then you've got what you wanted."

However, Philip was not destined to reach The Elms with only Caleb's left-handed good wishes.

As he passed through Oakswood there were many women, young and old—aye, and men, too, who either looked out from their cottage-doors, or ran down to the little wicket-gates, or laid aside their work, to inquire after Margaret and her child.

There were friendly and disjointed expressions heard on all sides.

"How is Mrs. Warner?" "We be so glad to hear of it, and hope as she'll do well." "They say it's a remarkable fine child, sir."

Philip was pleased at the kindliness and heartiness of the people, and stopped a minute to talk to each. He saw that they took a personal interest in the subject of his joy, and identified themselves with his wife and himself. Sympathy begets sympathy; and

Margaret's ever-ready love had roused kindred feelings in all around her.

The villagers appeared to be quite excited about the event at the Manor Farm; and Philip's ride that morning was destined to occupy so much more time than he had anticipated, that he could only leave a hasty message at The Elms announcing the birth of his first-born, and promising to call again shortly.

But he found no time to do so that day, for he hurried home, after his work, to be with Margaret, and the next was market-day at Ellaston.

He rode in, as usual, to transact his business, joining the group of farmers outside the market-room, where prices of grain and stock, and the prospects of the weather, were freely discussed.

It was very refreshing at all times to hear, amid that din of voices murmuring complaints—against the fine weather or the wet weather, the biting north wind or the shrivelling east wind, the scorching sun or the dull, cheerless fog, the rapid thaw or the sudden frost—in the midst of it all to hear Warner's voice putting in a word here and there to calm discontent. He constantly argued, "What business is it of ours to complain of the weather? And even supposing it were our business, what good would it do? If this season does not suit one crop, it is good for another. We had better be satisfied with whatever comes."

Philip could not bear to hear the weather abused and raved at, as though it were merely a controllable agency, always seeking to put farmers out of temper and spoil their crops, instead of being looked upon as obedient to the laws of the Mighty Orderer of wind and rain, sunshine and cloud. He never would allow himself to pass discontented remarks upon it, because, as he said, "it sounds like murmuring against God's will."

On the day in question, many a friendly farmer grasped Philip by the hand, and congratulated him warmly on the birth of his little daughter; he felt he had more kind neighbours than he ever thought he had until that moment.

When his business was done he turned away, and went into Carter Smith's office. His step-brother was pacing the narrow, dusty little room, his hands in his pockets, his sandy hair unbrushed, a pen behind his ear, and an anxious expression on his long, thin face.

He was so completely abstracted, and lost in thought, that he was not aware of Philip's entrance until the latter good-humouredly laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Well, Carter, I am sorry to interrupt you, but I wanted to tell you about Margaret, as well as talk over a little business with you."

Carter Smith involuntarily started; then as suddenly assumed a calm, impassive expression.

"Ah, yes, indeed! I believe I have to congratulate you on being a father. Well, it is very pleasant, no doubt; but children become expensive."

Philip laughed.

"The event had not struck me in that light, certainly; just now I find it quite enough to rejoice and be thankful."

"Mrs. Warner is doing well, I hope?"

"Very well, I'm obliged to you. By-the-bye, I wanted to see you upon a matter of some moment to myself. My lease of the Manor Farm will be up next Lady-day, and I have made up my mind to buy the property."

"Sit down, will you?" said Carter Smith, pushing towards him a horse-hair chair from behind his desk.

The honest farmer sat down, without caring to try and decipher the expression of his step-brother's face,—indeed it would have required a quick reader of physiognomies to have done so.

"As I said," continued Philip, "I have decided on buying the property, so that I shall have to ask you for that 5000*l.* which you invested for me not long ago."

"Well, you know, my dear fellow, it is invested

in a mortgage, and it will take some little time before I can get that money for you; there is not much cash floating about just now. I know by experience how greatly all kinds of securities are depreciated."

"I should be much obliged to you, however, if you would see to the matter as soon as you can," said Philip, decidedly; "and give such notice as may be necessary to the mortgagee."

"Very well, it shall be attended to as soon as possible."

As Philip was preparing to go, he turned again, and asked,—

"What sort of a person is Mrs. M'Donald?"

"Oh, a good creature enough; she helps on the housekeeping, and adds something to our income; the fact is, that I myself have had some heavy losses lately, and every little is of importance."

"But I want to know if she is respectable, and well-conducted," said Philip.

Mr. Carter Smith gave a grim smile.

"As to that, she is always going to church, and teaching at the school, and seeing Mr. Willoughby—much to my wife's annoyance; but there is nothing to dislike about her, except that she does not stick up enough to Matilda."

"Thank you; I will call again next Wednesday,

and you will tell me what you have done, and report progress, I hope."

Philip left the office, wondering at his own stupidity in asking Mrs. M'Donald's character of Carter Smith.

CHAPTER XII.

"... Domestic Happiness, thou only bliss
Of Paradise that has survived the fall,
Though few now taste thee unimpaired and pure,
Or, tasting, long enjoy thee."

COWPER.

CHAPTER XII.

MARGARET gradually recovered. The bright colour came again into her cheeks; and it was a cheerful sight to see her once more with Philip in the pretty drawing-room at the Manor Farm.

The little white cot, now tenanted, was placed on two chairs beside her; and ever and anon her occupation, whatever it might be, was laid aside while she bent for some minutes over her child with earnest and loving thoughts.

Mr. Willoughby came to greet her with paternal warmth, and he looked at her baby with the deepest interest.

"Well, Mrs. Warner," he said, "you needed but this to make your cup of happiness quite full!"

"Indeed, Sir, it seems as if I never could be thankful enough; then, again, there are moments when I am afraid, and almost dread the responsibility."

"He who gave you this child will help you to train her in the right way, and I doubt not but that

you will earnestly seek for guidance as you require it. I can well understand your mingled feelings on receiving such a treasure from God; it is well to look on your little one, helpless as she now is, and apparently unconscious of outward things, as immortal.

Margaret's eyes were fixed on Mr. Willoughby with deep seriousness.

"Yes, immortal," she repeated, slowly. "It is an awful trust, most awful. I never knew until now the full meaning of the responsibility which a child brings."

"It is better to realize it; you cannot consider the subject too deeply. I am often startled to see the way in which children are received when they enter this sinful world; sometimes without a welcome, where many have been given before; sometimes with wild delight, and sometimes indifferently; but rarely solemnly and prayerfully, as gifts from God, as lambs to be nurtured and trained for the Great Shepherd —as living souls! Keep this thought often in your mind, as you gaze on your precious child, for a mother's influence is paramount in early life, and almost moulds the future character. Oh, may you be united with your little one throughout eternity!"

Mr. Willoughby paused; the tears were in Margaret's eyes.

"Will you pray for me, Sir, that I may have

strength given me in the work which lies before me? I shall greatly need your prayers."

"I will not forget you, Mrs. Warner."

Philip had stood listening to the conversation, and he now joined in.

"May not I claim a share in your thought also, Sir? It strikes me that a father has an equal responsibility."

"Undoubtedly, Warner, though in a more general way; for during the earlier years of a child's life, the father's chief work is to uphold the mother. Blessed is the home where the parents are as one! and where the good precepts taught by their lips are exemplified in their lives. But, perhaps," he added, with a smile, "you will doubt my power of advising you on such subjects as these, considering that I have no family of my own."

"Your view is the right one, Sir, I am sure," said Warner. "I have often observed that the home, in a great measure, stamps the child; where there are cross words and ill-humours between man and wife, the young ones get cross and ill-humoured, too."

"Children are as impressible as wax," continued Mr. Willoughby, "and they will seldom recover wrong moulding in early life. I wish this fact could be more widely believed and acted upon. The characters of parents are constantly repeated in their little ones, and they hardly know how much of their

children's future joy or sorrow, good or evil, may not be traceable even to a careless word or trifling action in bygone years. 'A kiss from my mother,' said West, 'made me a painter;' and can we doubt that careers still higher and nobler spring from the blessed influences of faithful parents? You know the proverb, 'What is learned in the cradle, is carried to the grave.'"

"Well, Sir, Margaret and I are of one mind in our wish to bring up our child in the right way; and, God helping us, we will do so. I have a good help-meet here." And he placed his rough hand gently upon Margaret's head.

"You have, Warner. May a rich blessing come down upon you both in your efforts to carry out these good intentions. And now, Mrs. Warner, I want to know if you have engaged any one as governess to poor Winslade's children?"

"No, Sir. I have heard of several persons, but they have all failed, from one cause or another. Philip tells me there is a lady at Mrs. Carter Smith's, who came here to apply for the situation some days ago."

"It is exactly about her that I wished to speak. She is very desirous to leave Mrs. Carter Smith; and she seems, as far as I know, a most suitable person to place near children. I have seen a good

deal of her since she came to Ellaston; although her manner is quiet and singularly reserved, yet she acts like a person of high principle; and I think deeds are more satisfactory than words. As to her education and power of teaching, I am no judge, beyond the fact that she is invaluable to me in my Sunday-school, and that she has attached the children to herself in a remarkable degree."

"I am sure, Sir," said Margaret, "that if you recommend her, she will be exactly the person I long to see in charge of Mr. Winslade's children. Do you think she would suit him also?"

"I have very little doubt of it, she has behaved so wisely in her present most trying position, that I believe she would calmly thread her way in any household; besides, there are fewer difficulties with poor Winslade now. He is an altered and a softened man, and would value any one who was kind to his children."

"Then I should like to engage her at once, if Mr. Winslade will give his consent to the arrangement."

"It is best not to hurry into it too much, Mrs. Warner. I have only known her for some weeks. I certainly should like you to see her, and talk to her before finally engaging with her."

"Very well, Sir, I will do as you think best."

"There must be a delay of a few days in this case," interposed Philip, "for Margaret is hardly equal to seeing a stranger just yet."

The door opened, and Martha came in with a note, which she gave to Philip. He looked at it somewhat inquisitively, as his correspondence was not large. A letter was an event to him. After glancing at the address, he muttered, "Some bill, no doubt."

Mr. Willoughby rose to take his leave. Philip crumpled up the letter, put it in his pocket, and insisted on going with him, to see for his horse.

When Mr. Willoughby had ridden out of sight, he broke open the seal and read as follows:—

"Private and confidential.

"Dear Sir,—By a mere chance it has come to my knowledge that your step-brother is entirely ruined. I believe you have a stake in his affairs. It may not be too late to retrieve your loss now. But time presses. Do not delay.

"Yours, &c.,

"A Friend."

Philip read the note several times. "It must be a hoax," he said to himself. "Carter is known to be one of the shrewdest and most far-sighted men in money matters that could be found. He is never

likely to go beyond his depth in speculation; trust him for that."

Then came many guesses as to the writer; the handwriting was like that of a man. Carter Smith had enemies. There were many rumours afloat about him, and this might be the work of enmity.

However, Philip's mind was by no means easy; his usual course in any perplexity was to go straight to Margaret, whose sound good sense helped him out of many a difficulty. Just now he was afraid of exciting her. Mr. Willoughby was gone too far to be recalled, and Philip, therefore, had only his own bewildered thoughts to feed upon. He walked up and down the garden for some time, and then went into the house, to the room where Margaret was still sitting. She looked up instantly,—

"What is the matter, Philip?"

"Matter?—oh, nothing; it is of no consequence," he said, brightening, and trying to pass off the impression of gloom.

"Something is wrong, Philip, I am certain; you never hide anything from me, why do so now?"

"Because I should not forgive myself if I made you ill by my fancies."

"It will make me far worse to think you are hiding any anxiety from me."

"Well, Margaret, I suppose I must tell you; read this." He handed her the note, which she

read carefully, and then returned to him, saying, "I should advise you to go at once to Ellaston, and see into the truth of it."

"I imagine it is nothing but a hoax," said Philip, with assumed indifference.

"No, Philip, it is no hoax, there is a certain look of reality about the information. I have less confidence in Carter Smith than I ought to have, perhaps; at all events, I advise you to lose no time in ascertaining the truth."

Warner still hesitated, but Margaret pressed him strongly and urgently; accordingly he followed her advice, and started at once for the town.

He reached Ellaston when it was almost dark. The lamps were lighted in the High-street, and the gas burners were gleaming in the shops. They shone out dimly and indistinctly through the heavy fog. Carter Smith's office was closed long ago, so he called at No. 7. The servant told him that her master was gone up to town, and had not said what day he should return. "Perhaps," she suggested, "Mistress knows."

Philip waited until the servant had inquired of Mrs. Carter Smith, and brought down the answer, "She supposed it might be some days." This was most unsatisfactory, but as nothing more could be done that night, Philip went home, troubled and anxious.

If Carter Smith was ruined, as the anonymous note affirmed, he felt there was great reason to fear for the large sum which he had intrusted to him. On this sum Philip had received his half-yearly interest at 5 per cent. from Carter Smith, and so long as this had been the case he had not been curious as to where the investment was.

The loss of 5,000*l.* would just now be especially painful to him, as his landlord had decided on selling Colwall Manor Farm; if he had not the means of purchasing it, there remained but the alternative of leaving the farm altogether.

Philip turned away from the very thought—he could not endure it; he strove once more to argue himself into a disbelief of the whole suspicion, and to pooh-pooh a note which had given him such needless anxiety.

It was a battle between Reason and Hope. Carter Smith's uneasy manner at their last meeting would force itself upon his recollection, although at the time he hardly noticed it, and certainly thought nothing of it. This was Reason's whisper.

Hope refused to believe that Carter Smith could affirm the money was safe if it were not—no man would deliberately tell a lie.

"Alas!" said Reason, "men will do anything when they have hazarded their all on the cast of a

die, and stand on the edge of a yawning precipice; one sin leads to another."

Hope answered, "No one in his senses would commit a transportable offence, much less a cautious, calculating man like Carter."

"I suspect," whispered Reason, "notwithstanding all your arguments, that you have lost your money, and will have to leave the Manor Farm."

Here Reason triumphed, and Hope was silenced and put to flight, as poor Philip, thinking only of a coming disaster, sped sadly on his way to that home which might so soon be his no longer. The dull fog was clearing away, and a few bright stars were beginning to shine in the dark heavens. His eye turned upward for an instant to gaze at them. They shone forth—gigantic unrealized worlds—hung, as it were in space, submitting implicitly to the laws of that Being who placed them there, and accomplishing undeviatingly His will. Peopled they might be, for ought he knew, with myriads of such creatures as himself, only possibly without sin, and therefore doing their Master's will perfectly.

"What is man that Thou are mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou visitest him?" What are man's petty and miserable cares, he thought, when contrasted with all this immensity and grandeur! Man, who is ever murmuring and complaining at God's almighty will, and refusing to

obey it! Man, whose life is but a vapour, whose days are as naught, and who yet rebels and kicks against His light yoke and easy burden, and will have none of it! Oh, it is folly—mad, blind folly! I will leave all in His hands. I will take no thought for the morrow—the Lord being my helper; and then, come joy or come sorrow, He will enable me to say, "It is well."

That night he knelt, with his faithful wife beside him, and together they laid their troubles before Him who cared for them, and strove to cast their burden on Him who could alone sustain them,—on Him who, though He meteth out heaven with a span, and weigheth the mountains in scales, before whom the nations are as a drop of a bucket, yet permitteth no sparrow to fall to the ground without His knowledge, and numbereth each hair of our heads.

Philip rose up, trusting and fearless, believing that all things would work together for good, and experiencing the truth of the promise,—

"Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help; whose hope is in the Lord his God."

CHAPTER XIII.

"COUNT each affliction, whether light or grave,
God's messenger sent down to thee. Do thou
With courtesy receive him: rise and bow:
And, ere his shadow pass thy threshold, crave
Permission first his heavenly feet to lave;
Then lay before him all thou hast."

Aubrey de Vere.

CHAPTER XIII.

PHILIP was again in Ellaston early the next morning. He went straight to Carter Smith's office, where the clerk was lounging over the desk reading the newspaper.

"When does Mr. Smith return?" he asked.

"I can't say, Sir; he told me he was called to London on urgent business, and did not know what day he should return. There must be something wrong, I suspect. He owes me a year's salary, and I am very much afraid I shall never see it."

Philip turned pale; and after a few moments said, in an altered voice,—

"Has he left any papers or deeds in the office?"

"No, Sir; he has taken away the few that remained, for I have been looking about, and this gives me a strong notion that he is off for good. If so, I don't envy him his feelings, for he is heavily in debt to many hereabouts, and the curses of honest people will follow him."

Philip then walked up to No. 7, in hopes of

seeing Mrs. Carter Smith, and finding out her husband's address.

On arriving there he found the door half open, and the maid leaning against the outside railings, in earnest conversation with another woman. She moved towards the door when she saw his intention of going in, and said,—

"They're all gone, Sir. Mistress went off last night, and the bailiffs are just come into the house. She owed me six months' wages—worse luck—and I had work enough towards the last. I wish I had had the sense to leave when the other maid did, for it comes very hard on poor people to be cheated of their wages,—and I, who have an old mother who looks to me to support her—"

"Is Mrs. M'Donald gone too?" asked Philip.

"She's but just left, Sir, and gone to the Green Dragon, where she has taken a room for the present. 'Tis a good change for her, poor thing, for they led her a hard life here; and I never saw a milder or more uncomplaining lady. She gave me a sovereign towards my wages when she saw how I took on about them."

The maid would have continued talking, but Philip passed by her and went in. He wandered from room to room, where the most utter confusion reigned, from Mrs. Carter Smith's elegant drawing-room to the bedrooms and attics.

The bailiffs were busily engaged in valuing everything, even to the very clothes which, in the haste of a sudden departure, had been left behind. Many a gay dress and elegant drawing-room ornament, once the envy of Mrs. Carter Smith's friends, were now tossed aside as trumpery by those whom a few weeks before she would not have condescended to notice. "Thus passes the glory of the world," thought Philip.

After looking on at the ruin of his step-brother's home, bitter feelings were quieted in his kind, honest heart, and he muttered, "Poor fellow!"

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed one of the bailiffs scornfully, who was examining into the merits of a small inlaid table, and had caught the words: "Poor fellow! And they say he has ruined you as well as himself! It would take a long time before I could pity such a scoundrel, especially if he had done his best to drag me down along with him."

"Perhaps he has not injured me as much as you imagine. Anyhow, I must forgive, and try to forget, which is harder still."

Philip turned away, unwilling to continue the conversation, and slowly retraced his steps downstairs, pondering in his mind what course he had better pursue.

He inquired from Mrs. M'Donald at what time Mrs. Carter Smith left, and by what train she had

started from Gloucester, and then made up his mind to follow her, as soon as he had taken leave of Margaret.

The creditors had already telegraphed to the detective in London, describing Carter Smith, and ordering his arrest; but Warner felt it was the best plan to go himself. He hoped, almost against hope, that he might still find him in one of the various places in London where he was in the habit of staying, or that he might hear tidings of him from his banker. Accordingly he followed him, unwilling to leave a stone unturned, if by chance he might clear up the painful mystery.

He was soon launched into that vortex of busy human life—that teeming city of joys and sorrows, panting and heaving with its bustle, toil, pleasure, and misery—whither Carter Smith had fled, and whither many another like him flies from pursuit or shame, to be absorbed in its whirlpool and lost to the world.

Philip was absent for many days. Margaret felt lonely and anxious; she had rarely been separated from him before, since their marriage, and was so accustomed to share every interest, and to talk over with him every matter (however trifling), that it was a keen disappointment, amounting almost to a trial, to be thus absent from him at the very moment of all others when he most needed a friend and

counsellor. But she thought to herself, "He has his best Friend ever with him;" and Margaret, whose faith was strong and real, stayed her mind upon that thought.

She made daily strides towards recovery; she could attend to her household business now, and go out again as usual.

Not a morning passed but she spoke to the labourers of the farm about their work, adding many a kind inquiry after their wives and families, and making the little interview so pleasant to them, that none left her without a "Thank ye, ma'am!" or an air of satisfaction. Who can resist the sunshine of love and sympathy? Certainly not those whose whole life is one of toil and care, who earn in the sweat of their brow the very power to live. The gentle voice and kindly word has a peculiar charm to them, it goes straight to hearts so little accustomed to drink it in. Wherefore, then, is it, O ye who sit at ease! that the poor so rarely receive from some of you this blessed boon of courtesy and love? Wherefore must you change your voice and manner in speaking to the poor man, and give him rough and uncouth words, when to him your purer English and softer manner hath a fascination as strong and pleasant as the rich tones of a musical voice? And is not this a talent to be spent in winning him to , instead of driving him back to sin and discon-

tent? Ah! make but trial of your influence in these, so called, little things, and that trial will come back in tenfold blessings into your own bosom. Let your Christian faith break forth in look, and word, and manner, and it will bring its own reward from Him who seeth in secret. Margaret's behaviour at this juncture met with old Caleb's entire approval. When he took the orders from his young mistress, and set off to plant potatoes or clean out the stable, he might be heard at times soliloquizing thus:—

"She's one of the right sort, is our missus—does her duty, whether her husband sees her or no, and does it well;—that's what I like, a woman as ain't ashamed to work, as sets her hand to the wheel, and keeps it going; 'tis them sort of women makes a man rich—earns him money, and knows how to spend it, not in your silks and satins and fandangles, but in bread and cheese for the starving, and a shilling here and there towards rent-day. Ay, she's a rare one among the poor, for the matter of that; but I found her out from the first, that I did, and Martha knows it, or if she don't I'm very much mistaken."

These observations were not unfrequently the subject of grave attention from the other labouring men who might chance to be within hearing; they oftentimes said approvingly, "And you wer'n't far wrong neither, Master Wilks."

Margaret had many sources of quiet satisfaction

during her husband's absence. She remarked that a master's eye was scarcely missed in and around the farm, that order and regularity reigned just as if Philip were present. The willingness and alacrity of one and all of the labourers to do their appointed work showed very clearly how much the farmer was beloved. No wonder that Margaret's heart felt drawn towards them, and that she valued the opportunity of forming a little closer acquaintance with each. Then there were Philip's frequent letters, which, although bringing to her no hopes of the ultimate recovery of their property, at least convinced her of his welfare and love of home.

Again; she had many a kind friend to sympathize with her. Of these the most constant in his visits was Mr. Willoughby. Mr. Dalton, too, called whenever he had spare time to express his kindly feeling, and admire the little one.

The thought of Mr. Winslade's children occupied anxious moments in Margaret's day. The two eldest boys, it is true, went to school daily at Ellaston, but the younger ones were left entirely to Jessie, who, although she had now become a trustworthy girl, had scarcely had any education. Poor Winslade himself could not teach them, and it was of the highest importance to engage a kind and well-principled governess for these orphaned children.

Margaret often saw little Gertrude, who now

came running across the meadows all alone to "see Mrs. Warner and the new baby." She was deeply touched at the confiding absorbing love of this motherless child towards her. Gertie would come and stand or sit for hours nestled close beside her, quietly watching her and her baby, and trying to anticipate any little wants, or offering to run any messages. Margaret could not understand how it was that she found pleasure in so monotonous an enjoyment; but Gertie had become very thoughtful. Her merry childish moments were rare, and the last few months had greatly altered her. Her little tender heart was now overcharged with anxiety to cheer her suffering father. A part of his dreariness and desolation had unconsciously fallen upon her. Not a day passed in which she did not yearn for a mother's love, for the gentle tender caresses which had made her life at the Manor Farm all sunshine, and had brought out the latent warmth of her loving heart. Now that she was deprived of them she became graver and more sad, and less childlike. Her father always liked to have her by his side; there was balm to him in her sweet voice, her light step, and little acts of thoughtful love. He spoke gently and kindly to her, watching her every movement with a singular look of intense interest. But he was very reserved, and it was not in his nature to be demonstrative; nor did he talk to her of holy things, such as Mrs.

Warner had taught her; of the blessed Lord Jesus, whose boundless love and perfect example were the dearest thoughts of her heart; of the Holy Child at Nazareth, whose love and obedience she longed and strove to imitate; of the bitter cross on which He hung in agony that He might save her; of the glorious home so full of peace and joy which He had opened to her, and where she hoped and prayed she might one day enter to live with Him evermore. Her father never talked to her of these precious things. She consequently pined for Mrs. Warner again, and esteemed a few minutes spent near her as sufficient to stamp the day a happy one.

Children are capable of strange, deep attachments, beyond what we can imagine; and the unconscious influence which by so many is exercised over these little ones, is a great gift of God.

Margaret used it faithfully. She saw how the child loved her, and she strove to lead her by it to a higher object—to the only Being whose love is satisfying. She noticed anxiously little Gertie's subdued and thoughtful manner, and felt more and more the immediate need of deciding about a governess at the Elms.

This made her determine on seeing Mrs. M'Donald at once. She wrote a line to Mr. Willoughby, requesting him to ask Mrs. M'Donald to call at the Manor Farm as soon as she could make it convenient; and

Margaret, prepared with her usual timidity and shrinking to encounter this stranger. It was doubly distasteful to her now that Philip was away; but the remembrance of little Gertrude's clouded and thoughtful face made her almost long for an interview, which, otherwise, she so much dreaded.

Next day Gertie came running into the Manor Farm, breathless and eager,—

"Good morning, dear Mrs. Warner. Good morning, sweet little baby." And she kissed the baby's small, clenched hand. "Do you know there is a lady in black at the garden-gate, and she says she is coming to see you. I want so much, so very much to know who it is; and she has got such a nice voice, just like yours; and she looks like you, too, only her face is sadder. May she come in? May I ask her to come in?".

Gertie seemed quite excited.

"Martha will do so directly, darling. Will you run away, my child, for a little time, because I want to see this lady alone. You may play about in the garden till I call you."

"And afterwards may I come back to you and see the lady?"

"Very likely, dear."

So little Gertrude ran away, and Martha ushered in Mrs. M'Donald.

She was dressed, as usual, in deep mourning, with

a heavy black veil thrown over her bonnet, and half hiding her face, so that when she entered the room, Margaret scarcely saw her features, much less the expression which rested on them; her manner was calm, and even cold; she mechanically seated herself on the chair which Margaret placed for her, and received silently her friendly greeting.

"I have often heard of you from Mr. Willoughby," said Margaret; "and he has, I think, told you how anxious I am to find a kind friend and governess for Mr. Winslade's children."

She waited for an answer. Mrs. M'Donald said, coldly,

"He has."

Margaret was chilled and disappointed; it was so different from what she had expected; all her natural timidity returned, while she felt herself the object of the stranger's fixed and searching glance.

It was impossible to speak of what she hoped to find in a governess for the little Winslades, if she was met with such frigid answers; and she busied herself during this moment of repulse in arranging neatly the coverlid over her child.

When she looked up again, with the next question arranged in her mind, she bent her eyes firmly on the stranger.

There she sat, motionless and still, watching Margaret; their eyes met in a long, earnest gaze.

Margaret passed her hand slowly across her forehead, as if making an effort to recall a lost remembrance. Mrs. M'Donald untied her bonnet, and took it off.

Margaret started with a cry.

"Rachel!"

There was no response.

Margaret threw her arms round her in almost wild delight; but the pale, sad face was hidden between the thin, wasted hands; and heaving sobs told its tale, either of the overflow of pent-up feelings, or secret grief.

"Oh, Rachel, speak to me—speak to me, I beseech you!"

No! let her weep on, now; she has gone through years of suffering; she is weary and wayworn; her young heart is scarred and seared with the chilling winds of coldness, indifference, and neglect; her life-springs seem frozen within her; but the flood-gates are opening—the sorrow will out. The good God has led her on, through the burden and heat of the day, and will now cause that the oil and wine shall be poured into her wounded spirit. The stricken mourner shall find a place wherein to rest her desolate heart, and be content.

"Oh, Rachel, speak to me!" cried Margaret, with piercing earnestness.

Her only answer was leaning her head on Mar-

garet's shoulder, as if, at last, she had found the rest for which she had long been yearning. The heavy sobs gradually gave place to stiller tears, which, like a spring shower, clearing the air, calmed and refreshed her.

"I thought perhaps you would not own me, Margaret," she said slowly and mournfully.

"Not own you, Rachel!—my sister!—my only sister!"

"Our father shut his door against me when I married; I can never see him now on earth to receive his pardon and his blessing."

She lifted up her voice and wept, as Esau did, with an exceeding bitter cry.

Margaret pressed her closer to her heart.

"He soon forgave you, Rachel," she said, soothingly; "he wrote so many times to different places in America, where he fancied you might be, but he never received any reply. You were always in his thoughts, and after you were gone his spirits sank; he rarely smiled; he was always hoping you might return, and daily in our prayers did he entreat for his lost child, that he might once more fold you in his arms; but it was not God's will. And then we heard that you were dead. I do not know how the sad news came, but we believed it; and that broke his heart. A few weeks afterwards he died."

There was a long pause. Margaret's tears

flowed fast. Then she added, with a quivering lip,—

"Oh, Rachel, what a strange dream it is,—what an untold blessing and mercy!—you, whom I never hoped to see on earth again, thus suddenly given back! If you knew how many times I have longed for you—what a sad, lonely year I spent after father died, and I had no friend in the world till Philip saw me and loved me! Oh, Rachel, do not weep; I want to rejoice and be thankful."

"You may rejoice, Margaret, but rejoicing is not for me, nor do I seek for it; it is enough that you love me, and do not drive me from you;—more than enough;—I dared not hope you would receive me; so I have lived for the last few months at Ellaston, that I might be near you, and hear of you from time to time. I meant to try and win your love as a stranger, for I am changed since last we met."

She passed her hand over her pale, wan face.

"I thought you would not recognise me, so I meant to wait and win your love before I made myself known to you."

"Rachel, please do not talk like this, it cuts me to the heart. How could you ever doubt me? How could you live so near for all this long time, and never come to me—my sister?"

Margaret laid a tender and reproachful emphasis on the last word.

"Because I loved you; and when I heard all that was said of you, and the kind, good things you were doing, I loved you still more intensely; I felt that if you rejected me, my heart would break."

She clasped her hands, and kept silence.

"Rachel," said Margaret, at length, "if you care for me, never speak again of what people say about me."

"I will not; but I could not explain to you my reasons for acting as I did without this. Oh, Margaret, it seems as if the whole sorrow and care of years was breaking like a cloud, and passing from me."

"How much you must have suffered! you look so thin and ill. Some time you will tell me all that has happened, since the morning you left us, but not now; you are weary and exhausted."

"Yes—not now; I like to rest in this quiet happiness, and not recall the toil and pain of these past years; yet I never regret the sorrow, since it has led me to seek my comfort in God, my loving, heavenly Father, and not in man."

"This is greater joy than even seeing you again, Rachel; we are more one now than we ever were as girls, if we are both trying to love Him who first loved us. This is the groundwork of all true human love."

Not only Rachel, but Margaret also, looked weary.

Such a meeting with one who was, as it were, risen from the dead, was an immense strain on the mind; and now the intense excitement and joy gave place to a sense akin to exhaustion.

Rachel noticed it. "I must go, Margaret, and return to Ellaston; you are tired; but let me kiss your precious child—your firstborn. May I?"

There was evidently a thought lingering in Rachel's mind that Margaret would not look upon her as heretofore.

"What can you mean, Rachel? Why do you ask leave to kiss my child? It is unkind."

"Thank you, Margaret—thank you; but your husband may not wish you to be too intimate with me."

"Not with my own sister?" said Margaret, in a tone of the deepest reproach. "Surely you little know me, and still less do you know Philip; but you shall never return to Ellaston; my home is your home for the future; I could say, like Ruth, 'Whither thou goest I would go; where thou lodgest I would lodge. Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.'"

Rachel pressed her hand, but shook her head.

"No, Margaret, you must not ask me, or tempt me; I would rather not; and I cannot stop to-day,

even if I would. There is much to be settled at Ellaston. It is best for us both to part now; you need the quiet, and I need it also; there is almost pain mixed up with such intense happiness as mine."

Margaret used her utmost powers of loving persuasion to keep her sister with her, but in vain.

"I will return to-morrow, dearest Margaret, and then perhaps I can tell you all. God bless you. Do you remember how Jonathan felt towards David?—'And Jonathan loved him as his own soul.'"

Margaret again and again pressed her sister almost passionately to her heart, and Rachel left.

Little Gertrude was waiting to open the gate for her as she went out, and gave her a bunch of violets which she had picked from Margaret's flower-garden. They were all squeezed up, after the manner of children's nosegays, in a small, tight, half-faded little bunch; but Mrs. M'Donald's quiet smile of thanks, and "What pretty flowers!" made the child's heart beat with pleasure, and her eyes glisten.

"Mamma was very fond of flowers too," she said, in a low, soft voice.

Mrs. M'Donald bent down to kiss her. She longed to say something to little Gertie; but the words hung on her lips and would not come out,—

her heart was too full for utterance. So she passed on, glancing back at the window from which Margaret's eager, loving eyes were following her every step, till she disappeared in the windings of the lane.

CHAPTER XIV.

"There is one hope for souls repenting
With heart and work, alas! all incomplete.
It is the Cross which spans both worlds, presenting
A pathway sure, for the most feeble feet;
I see it now, outspread in all its might;
Who trusts that Bridge is safe."

The Name of Jesus.

CHAPTER XIV.

NEVER in her life had Margaret felt so impatient for the morrow as she did that evening. Rachel had come and gone so suddenly. She whom Margaret had long mourned over and counted as dead, had re-appeared like a vision for one short hour, but had vanished once more without any mention of her married life, without allusion to the cause of her mysterious return and change of name, without once referring to her husband. She had cast a veil over the past, as though it were some dark, fearful land that had been traversed, but of which the sufferings were too poignant for utterance; and such, indeed, was the case.

When the morrow did come, and found the sisters once more together, the painful story was told; though the numb, cold hand, the blanched cheek, the stern look, and the frigid attitude, revealed at how great a cost the revelation was made, even to a sister. Her tale of sorrow may be summed up in a few words.

Rachel had married a Virginian planter, against her father's will, and had gone out to America with her unworthy husband, young, fair and beloved. He soon wearied of her. The love he had so ardently professed grew cold, and then he neglected and ill-treated her, until her bright, joyous spirits were broken down, and the light-hearted girl had merged into the sorrowful woman. Yet, true to the instincts of her sex, she clung to him, and fulfilled her duty to him without a reproachful word. He had married her under the name of Droxford, but he changed it for that of M'Donald, in order to take a property in South Carolina which was suddenly left him at the death of a distant relation. One of the stipulations of the testator was that his own name should be perpetuated by his successor.

Mr. M'Donald did not long enjoy this accession of worldly goods. He was pulling down barns and building up larger ones. He was saying to his soul, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry." Yet the word had gone out against him,—"Thou fool! this night thy soul shall be required of thee."

He died suddenly, in the midst of one of his drunken orgies; and Rachel was thrown on the world, friendless, homeless, and alone.

Many fierce claimants hurried like vultures to [illegible] up the dead man's property and snatch it away

from the defenceless widow. She, on her part, only sighed to go back to her kindred, and saw, without a tear, her rightful goods torn from her. She was fain to content herself with a small annual sum, which was reluctantly doled out to her, and then she sailed for her native land.

When she reached England it was past midnight; but there was a great longing within her—a passionate longing—to kneel once more at the feet of her aged father and implore his pardon and blessing, so she landed at once and pressed onward. Hope gleamed in her heart, and at times lighted up the future of this earth's pilgrimage with streaks of sunlight. She could not sleep—she could hardly think. Hour by hour the swift railway train was drawing her towards that home she had saddened by her folly, but which now she felt she would cheer by her love and devotion.

At Birmingham Rachel got out and went on foot from the station, threading her way along the narrow streets and crowded thoroughfares, to the well-known little villa in one of the extensive suburbs of that great, teeming city.

Her heart beat quickly and her knees trembled as she rapped at the door.

It looked dirty; the paint was worn off, leaving great patches of dingy white here and there; the windows were thickly veiled in a coating of dust

and smoke; the small grass-plat, which once lay between the house and the road, was grass no longer, but gravel—gravel mostly hidden by weeds and delicate, pale moss; the neat, green railing which shut it in was blurred and defaced by chalk marks and mud. Yet her father took a pride in his trim, orderly little villa, and he could not bear to see a leaf or a blade of grass in the wrong place.

What years of suffering can be condensed into a moment!

Rachel's eye took in the full anticipation of misery. She turned cold, and gazed with a rigid, statue-like expression on the forlorn-looking maid-servant who opened the door.

"Pray what do you want?" she asked, impatiently.

"Does Mr. Graham live here?"

"No; he's been dead and gone for ever so long. We live here now—missus and I."

"And his daughter?"—Rachel's voice had sunk, and sounded strange and hollow.

"I've heard say she married some farmer down in Herefordshire."

A voice from within called, and the maid retired and closed the door just as Rachel sank down upon the ground, and past and present were forgotten in a merciful oblivion.

Some hours afterwards, when she awoke to con-

sciousness, Rachel found herself at a commercial hotel, under the good-natured and oppressive care of the bustling, middle-aged landlady.

The kind-hearted creature was chattering and fussing assiduously. She had a strong impression that the sorrowful traveller needed stimulating and cheering, and that this desirable end would best be attained by a torrent of words—such words as conveyed the usual platitudes of comfort. These she hurled in a strong voice at the scarce-recovered invalid.

And Rachel almost wished she was once more lying outside the little desolate villa.

Then, as she gradually became stronger, she recognised the good intentions of her kind hostess, and tried to show, by word and look, that she was grateful.

Days passed on—dark, gloomy days—in which Rachel lay, helpless as a child, under the constant care of the doctor and landlady.

They came to an end at last. She could sit up, and walk and do as others did; and then she made up her mind to try and get a situation as companion to some lady for a time, until she could look about and fix on any other sphere which might suit her better.

It was then that Mrs. Carter Smith's advertisement caught her eye. The county attracted her,

for did not Margaret live in Herefordshire, and might she not in this way trace the beloved sister to her home? She placed it all in humble, childlike confidence before her God; she asked His guidance, His blessing, and then she wrote in answer to the advertisement.

"The rest you know," Rachel added, as she finished her story.

And so the sad tale was told, never to be repeated.

Margaret's sympathizing words fell gratefully on ears too long accustomed to coldness, indifference, and unkindness. Yet no words would ever heal the great scars which sorrow had branded upon Rachel's heart, and which had transformed the gay, volatile, romantic girl, into the patient, reserved, stern woman; yes, stern, for she showed herself no pity, but seemed to be ever repressing and crushing down her every sense. She had been gradually disciplined to bear without a murmur trials, the greatness of which could only be measured by the effect they had produced upon herself.

It was in accordance with this self-imposed severity that she refused to come to the Manor Farm. Margaret could not understand why Rachel should stedfastly deny herself the pleasure of living with her,—why she should still persevere in her determination of becoming governess to Mr. Winslade's

children; and she entreated Rachel with all earnestness to change her resolution, but in vain.

"I am nerved up to suffer," she said; "it has taken long years to conquer my rebellious spirit, and to make it submit; even now it may only be lulled, not quelled; if too much joy and happiness came for a time, I might be unstrung, and unable to bear patiently the sorrows which will surely fall to my lot again; for 'Man is born to sorrow, as the sparks fly upward.'"

"But not to be sorrowful," said Margaret; "and our Heavenly Father never meant us to reject the blessings He Himself places in our path; 'sorrow may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.'"

"The morning means in Heaven, Margaret, not here."

"That is true in the highest sense, but even on earth there is a time to laugh, a time to rejoice; and we are wrong to put from us the blessings and comforts which are sent by a loving Father, who doth not willingly afflict, who deals His chastisements for a little season for our profit, but mixes sweet with bitter in the cup of life. I like the Epistle to the Philippians, dear Rachel, especially on this account, that it urges Christians to 'rejoice;' that word is the key-note which runs through the whole Letter."

Rachel shook her head.

"It is safest to mourn," she said; and Margaret's arguments failed to alter her strong resolution. She would not trust herself in too much joy; her heart burned within her to serve God perfectly, yet it was less in the spirit of a little child than in that of an anchorite. She looked too much at herself, too little on her Lord; consequently, she lacked the buoyant, trusting spirit of her sister. A fearful, trembling mistrust allowed her no elasticity of heart; it fettered her soul; it laid upon her a heavy burden of doubts and uncertainties, and cast a shade of sadness over her every act and thought.

The two sisters might have been compared to light and shade; the one all brightness, faith, and hope, rejoicing in her home, her husband, her child, her friends, her hourly mercies, and, above all, in her God, her precious Saviour, her redemption through His Infinite Love; and then, from this inner life of thankfulness and rejoicing, she looked out upon the fair world in which her God had placed her, to enjoy and revel in the loveliness which lay all around her; her heart took wings, and darted upwards towards Heaven with a thrill of joy as she bent over sweet bright flowers, or listened to the song of birds, or drank in the pure morning breeze; thankfulness made her joyful in the midst of daily duties, and smoothed down daily cares; it made the dullest things bear-

able, the commonest work pleasant; and lit up with its heaven-born radiance the whole tenor of her life; her motto was, "Rejoice in the Lord always."

With Rachel it was otherwise; she had not, like Margaret, given her heart to God in earliest youth; she had strayed far away; she had suffered; she had "come to herself," as the prodigal had done, had awaked up from her wretchedness with the cry, "I will arise, and go to my Father," and had sought and found her Lord—her Saviour; but, as yet, she was at the outset of the Christian race; she saw men as trees walking. The full, clear sunshine of unclouded faith had not yet burst upon her soul, so that the perfect freeness and completeness of salvation was only seen through a glass, darkly. She sought, by stern mortification and repression, to bring herself nearer to God, instead of fastening her soul on Christ, living in Him, and, through that close union, following with hope and love wherever He would lead her, through rugged and steep paths, or beside still waters.

Rachel's mind was firmly bent on renouncing the proffered home at the Manor Farm, and accepting the office of governess at The Elms. Margaret yielded, and together they talked long and earnestly about Mr. Winslade and his little ones. Margaret unfolded to her sister all her desires for these children, and

felt an unspeakable comfort in the thought that they would have such a friend and adviser as Rachel.

"You were always fond of children, Rachel, I remember well."

"Yes, and I always shall be; there is something in their simplicity and trustfulness which soothes me beyond all else. It will be good for me to be with them; a mixture of joy and sorrow," she added, abstractedly.

"Do you know," said Margaret, "I have an idea, now, that none but a mother can fully enter into the preciousness of these little ones. I feel so differently myself since my child has been given me."

Rachel raised her eyes, and fixed them on Margaret with an expression of silent suffering—

"I am a mother."

Margaret started, pained and agitated.

"Oh, Rachel! you never told me this. Why did you hide it from me? Where is your child?"

"In Heaven," said Rachel, with a sad, calm voice; "he only lived a few weeks, and God took him. I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

CHAPTER XV.

If loving hearts were never lonely,
If all they wish might always be,
Accepting what they look for only,
They might be glad—but not in Thee.

Well may Thine own beloved, who see
In all their lot their Father's pleasure,
Bear loss of all they love save Thee,
Their living, everlasting treasure!

A. L. Waring.

CHAPTER XV.

PHILIP'S return was a sad one. He brought no tidings of Carter Smith. His search had been utterly fruitless. It only remained for him to tell Margaret the full extent of his losses, and, as he somewhat bitterly said, "to begin life again."

Her bright hopeful spirit, and her new joy in her long lost sister, cheered Philip's despondency, and the influence of a happy home and a loving wife took off the keen edge of anxiety. The sight, too, of Margaret's faith in God led him also to strive to place the future in His hands.

He wrote at once to his landlord stating his inability to buy the farm, and expressing his readiness to vacate the land as soon as a purchaser was found.

When he brought the letter to Margaret he was pale and agitated, and it was very apparent with how hard a struggle, and what acute pain, he renounced the home so dear to him. It was the home in which he had found such prosperity and happiness.

But we must draw a veil over these dark days, when it required strong effort on the part of both Philip and Margaret to do the daily work and bear the load that lay heavily on their hearts.

Margaret suffered for her husband, not for herself. To her it mattered comparatively little whether they had two servants or none at all, whether they were affluent or poor, whether their home was the Manor Farm or the smallest cottage. Not that she was altogether indifferent, or that she did not love her home with a strong, deep love, but it was the habit of her mind to see the bright side of everything. So now, she thanked God that the loss of property would not deprive her of her husband, her child, or her sister. She felt that He who gave had a right also to take away; she remembered the words, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," and put aside the over-anxious thought for the morrow—the unknown future—seeking only to help her husband and support him in his time of trouble.

It was her hardest trial to witness his careworn face and subdued manner. Although she was invariably cheerful before him, yet her heart was oftentimes heavy in consequence of the load which, as she saw, weighed down his spirits. In the silence of her own room she poured forth earnest cries to her Father in Heaven. She needed faith and courage for her

husband as well as for herself, and she opened out the grief and the pain before Him who alone could help her.

This trial brought Rachel into closer acquaintance with Philip—for she was now settled at The Elms, and came to see Margaret daily. Philip learnt to love and admire his wife's sister, not only for Margaret's sake, but for her own; her utter unselfishness and her tender sympathy touched him, when he considered how much she herself had suffered—how blighted her own life was upon earth, and how uncomplainingly she had bowed to the cross which her Lord had laid upon her.

Rachel could weep for others, but she did not weep for herself; and so she became a silent reproach to Philip. It gave him courage to observe the patient and submissive spirit which God had given her, and he turned to his loving wife and sweet child with many a bright glow of thankfulness, angry at himself for murmuring if, amid so much happiness, some good things were taken away.

He was learning day by day the lesson which this trial was designed to teach him. His faith was conquering his fears, and quiet was returning into his heart.

After some delay, an answer came from Philip's landlord. It was full of considerate kindness; he

said that he had made up his mind not to sell the farm for the present, so that, if Philip pleased, he might remain his tenant.

Margaret looked over her husband's shoulder as he read the letter. Hope gleamed in her eye. She watched him eagerly and anxiously. He sat motionless, reflecting upon it, and then said, gloomily, "I could not go on with the expenses of such a farm as the Colwall Manor—at least, not without much sacrifice of personal comfort. It would be better for me to obtain some agency, where the income would be certain, and no capital would be required."

"This is your home, Philip; you like it better than any other place in the world; and if a little self-denial would enable us to stay here, surely we can put up with it?"

"Yes, if I alone were the sufferer."

"There is no suffering to me in living a strictly economical life; it is only what I was accustomed to before I married. I could manage without a single servant, if you liked to shut up all the house except two or three rooms."

"You are a good wife, Maggie; no, I could not bear to see you slaving beyond your strength; it would be a greater pain than leaving this place."

"At all events, let us give it a trial; we can but go away if the experiment does not answer."

Margaret was very urgent, and Philip silently

acquiesced. His spirits gradually returned from that hour, while Margaret's expanded and burst forth under the influence of this renewed hope.

She set her mind at once to abridge and curtail all luxuries. With much difficulty she persuaded Philip to give up the carriage, and to reduce their establishment to one servant. But the sternest economy was practised upon herself; in things small and great she exercised the most determined self-denial, and she did it in such an unobtrusive way that even Philip could not for the most part detect it. His home from this time was on a simpler scale. The expenditure was much reduced; but there was no discomfort withal, and he got into a habit of rubbing his hands in a vehement elated manner, and exclaiming, "I declare, Maggie, we are just as comfortable now as we were when first we married, and yet we are living at one half the expense. It is all your doing; there is not a cleverer manager in all England."

Margaret invariably smiled—a quiet happy smile, and if Rachel chanced to be present she smiled too, but it was sadly and anxiously. She was a woman, and saw with a woman's eye. Although her daily life was spent at The Elms, yet in the course of her frequent visits to her sister, she could perceive at how great a cost of personal necessaries and comforts the money was saved to make Philip

comfortable. She was aware that Margaret was working beyond her strength, yet she dared not say so. A mere hint to this effect so troubled and pained Margaret, that she ceased remonstrating, and bent all her efforts to helping her quietly and silently, by working for the baby, and by many little gifts which she was now in a position to make, owing to the salary she received from Mr. Winslade.

He was aware of his friend Warner's difficulties, and knowing that the offer of money would have been at once refused, he turned over in his mind by what means he could be of service to those who had done so much for him. The tender intimacy that existed between Rachel and Margaret led him to offer to the former a very considerable yearly sum, so that she might have the power to add to her sister's comforts. Rachel only acquiesced in this plan of Mr. Winslade's after much persuasion on his part, and out of respect for the feelings of gratitude which prompted it. Well and wisely did she profit by her enlarged income to minister to those so dear to her at the Manor Farm. Mr. Winslade, too, was comforted in the hope that he was of some use to those who had been so good to him.

It was at the beginning of these harder times, in the hitherto cloudless married life of Philip and Margaret, that they brought their little one to Church and gave her up to God. A calm blessed

day it was in the midst of many anxious and troubled ones.

The bells rang merrily from Ellaston Church-tower that Sunday afternoon, and along the Oakswood meadow-path there were groups of people all directing their steps to the country town. They responded to the exhorting sound of the old church bells, and by degrees the simple kindly folk, some in smock frock, some in scarlet cloak, some in garments of later date, congregated in the churchyard, or slowly entered the sacred building. A look of interest and expectation rested for the most part on every face, and frequent glances were turned towards the churchyard gate.

A short waiting time, and then the tall and slightly bent figure of Mr. Willoughby was seen coming through it. He looked around as he passed on to the church—a kind, grave, earnest look, which was answered by a respectful recognition from the people grouped around, while words of affection towards him were muttered by many amongst them when he had passed out of hearing.

Another short waiting time, and a strongly built but infirm man entered slowly and painfully through the churchyard gate, leaning partly on his crutches, and partly on the friendly arm of Mr. Dalton. It was Mr. Winslade. By his side, and watching him with keen interest, was Gertie, his gentle, timid

child. Near her came Rachel, so near that one little hand was tightly clasped in hers, and her dark eyes were ever and anon fixed on Rachel's loving face. Gertie's brothers followed behind. There was a hush—pitying glances and sympathizing whispers—until they had passed by and entered beneath the dark Norman archway.

And now the bells changed, the loud exulting peal ceased; there was a moment's pause of complete silence, and then one quick impatient little bell set up a succession of sharp vibrations, expressing great decision in its tone and a touch of reproach. The people seemed to feel it, for there was a general stir, and breaking up of parties, and looking at watches, and wandering off to the church door.

Just in the midst of this universal movement the little gate once more opened as Philip and Margaret, with Martha and the baby, passed through.

Those who were still lingering in the churchyard stopped, stepped aside, and gazed with eager interest at the young farmer and his wife. Margaret had got her infant clasped in her arms, and did not observe that many a familiar face from Oakswood was watching her husband and herself. Her mind was pre-engaged. Her thoughts had taken wing and flown upwards into the presence of that God to whom she was now going to dedicate her child, and a certain quiet, heavenlike peace rested upon

her face—a reflection of the blessedness upon which her soul was feeding.

She had risen from her knees, where in the solitude of her own room she had long been communing with her Heavenly Father, to come forth and give up to him her firstborn, publicly, in the face of the congregation.

She had been with Jesus, and earth for the time was dim and indistinct.

The christening party collected round the old carved font—a serious, solemn group, suggesting grave thoughts to the congregation assembled.

Those who stared out of mere curiosity, or were secretly intent on criticizing the dresses of the mother and godmothers, experienced an uncomfortable sensation of self-reproach and prickings of conscience. They felt that their frivolity and irreverence was out of place. Those who had hitherto passively endured the service, who took no interest in it, but abstracted themselves, and allowed their thoughts to wander off to business or pleasure during its continuance, were aroused to a certain vague interest and a degree of attention to the service they had never shown before; while those, on the other hand, who entered into the deep and touching reality of the entrance of another soul into the Church of Christ on earth—these were enlivened and quickened to fervent love and prayer.

To all, the feeling was conveyed in greater or less

degree, that baptism was something more than a mere outward ceremony—that it was a holy and sacred mystery; otherwise, what could make Philip look so earnest and absorbed, or the tears stand in the young mother's eye, as together they watched the venerable clergyman sign the sign of the Cross on the infant brow, "in token that hereafter she should not be afraid to confess the faith of Christ crucified, but manfully to fight under his banner against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto her life's end," and utter the "Amen," so fervently and prayerfully? It was an Amen which seemed to implore the unseen but ever present Saviour of these little ones, to take the weak, helpless babe in His Almighty arms, and bring her safely over the waves of this troublesome world, "so that, finally, she might come to the land of everlasting life, there to reign with Him, world without end!"

Rachel received her godchild from Mr. Willoughby's arms; and as she bent down to fold her tenderly in the warm covering which had for the moment been taken off, some tears fell over the snow-white drapery. They flowed from a heart where thankfulness and sorrow were mingled;—she was reminded of the day when her own firstborn was in like manner given up to his Saviour, and she longed to press him once more to her bosom, and see his

little face; therefore it was that her tears fell. But then her heart leaped again, for she knew her child was safe for ever in the Fold above. And what could she wish more for him? Gertie looked up at her with an inquiring, pitying expression, and Margaret whispered,—

"There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying."

Rachel caught the train of her sister's thought, and her own heart echoed back the triumphant words —words that came to her mind years after, with an equal power, when she needed their comfort as much as then. The service was over, the people streamed forth into the world again, and by-and-by the solemn, dark old church was once more hushed into profound silence; but the recording angel had gathered up many prayers that Sunday afternoon, and laid them before the Lord of Glory.

CHAPTER XVI.

"How sweet to think that he who stands
Beside our bed of pain,
And, thoughtful, counts the ebbing sands
Which yet for us remain;

"Comes in the humble strength of faith,
Such comfort to afford
As best may help the deeper work
Of his Physician Lord!

"And while with skilful hand he tries
Diseases to control,
Not only sees a mortal frame,
But an immortal soul;

"And prays for grace to do his part
In all God's wondrous plan;
And sanctifies his healing art
To the best good of man."

MONSELL'S "*Spiritual Songs.*"

CHAPTER XVI.

Mr. Willoughby was hard at work in the little study at Ellaston Rectory, seated at a table covered with books and loose papers. A row of letters, apparently just written, lay on the floor beside him; while the sheets of his Sunday sermon might be seen scattered over the habitual furniture of his writing-table. He was evidently deeply occupied, and pressed for time; but there was no trace of impatience or annoyance on his face, when the door opened, and the servant-maid said,—

"'Please Sir, Mr. Dalton is at the door. I told him I thought you were very busy; but he said I was to ask if you could see him for a few minutes."

"Certainly, Anne," said Mr. Willoughby; "you had better show him in here."

Mr. Willoughby received the little doctor kindly and cordially, and offered him a seat; but Mr. Dalton, though he accepted the proffered chair, seemed awkward and embarrassed. Mr. Willoughby broke the silence,—

"It is some little time since I have seen you; not indeed since the christening of Mr. Warner's child, three weeks ago; but I heard that you were away from home."

"Yes; the fact is that I wanted a little change. It is good for a man to have a rest sometimes; and it is not often that I indulge myself in that way."

"Very true; and I was glad to hear of your having a holiday; but you were much missed, I can assure you. Many of your patients have asked constantly after you, and say they cannot get on at all without you."

"Well, it is pleasant to be missed," said the little man, rather sadly; "but it is a pity one can't be missed by the very persons one most cares for. However, I could not have stopped at Ellaston just this last fortnight. It was impossible—quite impossible."

The doctor fidgeted somewhat uneasily on his seat, and played nervously with his watch-chain.

"I hope nothing unpleasant has occurred," said Mr. Willoughby, anxiously.

The doctor glanced down at his boots, and seemed to be more nervous even than before.

"I am afraid you have had some trial, Mr. Dalton. I hope I need scarcely say that if I can be of use to you in any way, you may command my services."

There was a pause; and Mr. Dalton, with some struggles, pulled out his watch, but put it back again without looking at it. At length he said, with evident effort,—

"Yes, indeed, since I saw you last I have been much tried. None, I fear, can fully enter into my sorrow; and though I know full well your good, kind heart would feel for me, yet it is best I should bear it in silence and alone. The hopes and eager expectations of many months have been suddenly swept away from under me, and the sunny future, to which I had ventured to look forward, has been dissipated by a word."

"I can only say," began Mr. Willoughby, "that I am truly sorry for you;" but Mr. Dalton interrupted him.

"Do not let us refer to the subject again. It is deeply painful to me to dwell upon it; and I know I have your sympathy, even although I check its expression in words. My object in coming here was not so much to ask you to feel with me in my sorrow, as to seek your advice on a point connected with some parochial work. It is a matter which has, so to speak, grown out of my present trouble. You see, I have never done much hitherto for my fellow-creatures."

"How so, Mr. Dalton? I have always thankfully felt that you were very faithful in your pro-

fessional duties, and have had reason to believe that you recognise in some measure your nobler and higher duty of using your influence with the sick and suffering, to point them to the Great Physician of souls."

Mr. Dalton shook his head.

"I have wished to do this," he said; "but, unfortunately, wishing and doing are two very different things. If intentions were always followed by actions, there would be more good done in the world than there is. No, no; I have never been of much use to my fellow-creatures, and now it lies heavy on my conscience. I trust that for the future I shall have more heart in carrying out my good intentions, and that God will help me to do so."

"If this is the case, you will find much gold in your present trial, and in the end you will see in it 'a blessing in disguise.'"

"Indeed I hope it may be so. The matter which I now wish to speak to you about is shortly this" (he added with a deep-drawn sigh):—"I am a single man, and my evenings are unoccupied, except when I happen to be specially called out on professional business; and it has struck me that I might be of some good in the town among the young men. If you would like to place in my hands the management of the Association, I am

quite ready to undertake it. Here I am," he said, clapping his hand on his chest with somewhat of his wonted emphasis; "make what use you like of me."

After a short pause, Mr. Willoughby replied,—

"Your profession is hard work, and when the day is over you would find it a great tie if you were obliged to go out to the Institution, and have your evenings broken into. At the same time, it is very far from being my wish to check your desire to come forward and help us; but I am anxious that you should count the costs before you embark upon the undertaking."

"I have already done so. It has not been without much thought and reflection that I have come to place the matter before you. Others are working for the good of their fellow-creatures, and why should I be a cumberer of the ground?"

"Your first duty and most blessed work, Mr. Dalton, will ever be by the sick bed of your patients. A Christian doctor is no cumberer of the ground."

"I feel the truth of what you say; but still there is a large margin of time every day which I desire to employ in the service of others. Besides which, if I may speak out, I should like to take a little of the machinery of your parish work off your shoulders, and place it on to mine. I do not see

why the clergy should have all the labour, while we laymen rarely so much as lift a finger to help them. It is not only subscriptions that we ought to give,—mutual co-operation is 'the missing link' between us."

"I appreciate your kindness and thought for me exceedingly," replied Mr. Willoughby; "and I can say, with perfect truth, that there is nothing I should like better than to see you Secretary of our Young Men's Association. It would, undoubtedly, relieve me personally of a good deal of labour; and I think, further, that your influence amongst the members of the Institution would be of untold good. People are apt to take the clergyman's work amongst them as a matter of course, and too often think that, when we bring before them the subject of religion, we are only doing that for which we are paid. The consequence is that, in many respects, the laity have a great advantage over us; and I think it has been often found that they have been very successful in influencing the young men of the day. Do you, however, really believe that you can give up the time necessary for this work?"

"I am certain of it, Sir. If I undertake the office, I shall not fail for want of endeavour," said the doctor, decidedly.

"You must not think me discouraging if, while placing the greatest faith in your honesty of inten-

tion, I yet warn you against self-confidence. The mechanical part of your work as Secretary is but a section of it; and you will doubtless find, as I have done, that out of your connexion with the young men, much will arise both to rejoice and to pain you. You will be called upon to act as a friend, an adviser, and a judge. They are keen critics of conduct; and it is no easy matter to avoid arousing prejudices and distrustful feelings, while to allay them is a matter of considerable difficulty. I am sure that, without God's help, your endeavours must utterly fail."

"I think I may venture to say that my first desire is to serve Him in anything I undertake; but I heartily thank you for your counsel. It is just what I greatly need. I, unhappily, am but a novice in any good work, and I am too self-confident. It is my besetting sin."

"One word more, Mr. Dalton, if you will allow me. Let your motive be single in this and every other labour for your Heavenly Father. Look well into your heart. It is deceitful; who can trace its secrets or its wiles? Judge yourself. The key-note of our walk as Christian men must be Love; love to God in Christ, and then love to man. The Collect for Quinquagesima Sunday is one which you would do well to use daily as you enter upon your new work.

"'O Lord, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth: send Thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which, whosoever liveth is counted dead before Thee: Grant this for Thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake.'"

"Amen," said the doctor, with great earnestness, as Mr. Willoughby concluded. "I will make use of that prayer, Sir, and I thank you heartily for your counsel and advice."

As Mr. Dalton rose to go away, Mr. Willoughby opened a drawer in his study-table, and handed over to him a parcel of papers. "There are our rules, drawn up for the most part by the young men themselves; here, too, are a few more papers on the same subject, which I dare say you will like to read. There are, however, many things in connection with the Association which I should like to talk over with you; and if you can dine with me to-morrow, we shall be able to do so at leisure."

The invitation was thankfully accepted, and Mr. Dalton shortly after took his leave. But Mr. Willoughby found it difficult at once to go back to his former work. He could not help dwelling on the previous conversation; he saw that Mr. Dalton was sad at heart, and, to all outward appearance, desirous of walking more closely with his God than he had here-

tofore done; and he rose, locked his study door, knelt down, and earnestly prayed that God Himself would lead his friend in the narrow and strait road, and guide him safely amidst his many trials and difficulties. Little did Mr. Dalton think, as he stepped forth to mix once more in the busy hum of life, of the prayer which was even then ascending up to heaven on his behalf!

Whilst Mr. Dalton was thus mapping out his work, and settling down with strong determination, albeit with a heavy heart, to his solitary future, Rachel's plans were slightly altered. She was restless and dissatisfied at being of so little help to Margaret in the pressure of her daily work. She gradually awoke to the conviction, that the self-denial which she had imposed upon herself in refusing to live at her sister's house, was reflecting itself upon Margaret. It is true that Rachel worked for her at The Elms, and supplied many a luxury which, otherwise, she would never have enjoyed; but this was not enough; and it was quite impossible for her, so long as she lived at The Elms, to give the physical assistance which would now have been most acceptable to her sister.

Rachel accordingly determined to ask Philip and Margaret if they would allow her to change her resolution, and to look upon the Manor Farm as her home, while she could still fulfil her duty as

governess at The Elms as heretofore. She would not for the world break into her sister's home life, yet how much relief and ease might she not give Margaret by an hour or two of loving service in the morning and in the evening!

These thoughts had for some time been in her mind, and at last she went over to the Manor Farm to talk over her plans.

Philip and Margaret gratefully and joyfully accepted her proposal as a personal favour, and a subject of unfeigned thankfulness.

"It is the very thing I have often wished for, Rachel, and dared not propose," said Philip. "I know how helpful you will be to Margaret, and really she wants some help."

"No, indeed," said Margaret. "If Rachel lives here, it is on condition that she rests while she is under our roof. Her work is at The Elms, and her time here must be given up to quiet and relaxation."

Rachel interposed—

"We need not fix yet what I may or what I may not do, dear Margaret; it is enough that I am happy, most happy, to call the Manor Farm my home."

"But after what Philip has said," added Margaret, "I am so fearful lest you should think yourself obliged to help me in any way, and indeed I never

could allow it. Remember, Rachel, the candle cannot be burned at both ends."

"And yet that is exactly what you are attempting," said Philip; and then, turning to Rachel, "She tries to do her duty to me, to her child, to the farm lads, to the Oakswood people, and she does it too; but when you add to this all household cares, the consequence is—" Margaret rose up, and put her hand upon her husband's mouth to stop him; but Philip persisted,—"the consequence is—she will kill herself."

"When I am here, Philip," observed Rachel, quietly, "the work can be shared."

"Thank you, Rachel; and my mind will be greatly relieved, I can assure you."

Margaret shook her head, but felt it useless to argue the point against the majority, and only said, "Poor Gertie! how sad she will be when you leave The Elms!"

"It can hardly be called leaving," suggested Rachel; "for I shall be all day with her; besides which, she has become so much more merry and playful, that she and her brothers are as happy as possible together. Mr. Winslade always likes them to be with him in the evening."

"So we shall have you with us after all!" exclaimed Margaret. "That is just what I longed for,

and the only shadow in the sunshine is my terror lest you should begin helping me."

"And the only shadow in *my* sunshine," said Rachel, "is that you should think of denying me that great happiness."

CHAPTER XVII.

"LORD, how oft shall I forgive?
O my soul! dost thou not live
Every day and every hour
On thy Father's love and power
Still vouchsafed thee, tho' with sin
Days will end, as days begin;
Life, with all in life bestow'd,
Justly forfeit to thy God?

"When thou hast the sum of all
Blessings, that uncounted fall
Round thy path, the light and love
Waiting on thee from above,
All by boundless mercy brought,
Into judgment ent'ring not;
Thou hast some reply from Heaven
How offenders are forgiven.

"Then, my soul, be this thy law
For each breath which thou dost draw
Of God's mercy, full and free,
Let thy love out-breathèd be;
And, as with each Heav'n-sent gale
Thou forgiveness dost inhale,
Let thy heart breathe out again
Pardon to thy fellow-men."

MONSELL'S *Spiritual Songs.*

CHAPTER XVII.

THE twilight was rapidly fading at the end of an April day some few years later; the wind was cold and raw, and clouds were scudding over the pale blue sky, while drops of rain began to fall at intervals. The Manor Farm was scarcely visible through the damp veil which hung over all things; and the little hamlet of Oakswood was marked out only by the tiny sparks of light which twinkled indistinctly first from one cottage, then from another.

There was but little cheerfulness in the outward scene; but no untoward weather could check the joyous tones of young voices, which were heard clear and distinct in the thick air, long before the figures from which they proceeded could be seen. There were two merry children, under the escort of a pleasant-looking young woman, who was in vain suggesting to her charges that it was safest not to talk in the damp air, "else the fog may get down your throat," she added, warningly.

"And if it did, what would it do there, Jessie?" asked one little voice, inquiringly.

"Why, I don't exactly know, dear," said Jessie, rather puzzled; "but, anyhow, it would do no good, and your Mamma said I was to be careful you did not catch cold."

"Do you think she meant us not to talk as we came home?" once more inquired the same little voice.

The speaker was a bright, rosy, fair-haired child, with a pair of earnest, wondering eyes.

"I am sure if your Mamma had known such a fog as this was coming on, she would have told you to remain silent on your way back."

"I won't talk any more," said the little girl, pressing her rosy lips close together with an air of determination.

"That's a good child, and if I carry Master Charlie we can make haste and run home."

But Rachel's good resolution was destined to be put to a severe test before she reached the Manor Farm. As they passed Martha's cottage the old woman ran out, armed with a huge cotton umbrella, and overwhelmed the children with kind words, anxiously urging them to turn aside into her cottage till the storm was over. This Jessie stedfastly resisted, for fear of making Mrs. Warner uneasy at the children's late return home. Martha therefore could only insist on their taking her umbrella to shelter them. Her offer

was thankfully accepted, and they hurried on. There was only time for Martha to snatch a kiss from the little one, and to slip an apple into Rachel's small hand, and then she ran back into her cottage out of the pelting rain.

And the little girl never said so much as "Thank you!" although the colour mounted to her cheeks, and she looked imploringly at Jessie, as if she could absolve her from her self-imposed resolution.

Jessie saw the child's distress, and called after old Martha, "Miss Rachel wants to thank you for the apple, but she mayn't talk because of the damp."

So they all ran homewards as fast as they could.

Just at the end of the meadow, as they were pausing for breath, Jessie's brother, one of Mr. Warner's carters, came up to them, and kindly asked Rachel if he should carry her home, adding, "The Missus said I might come and meet you. She has only just dismissed us from the class, and seems anxious like about you."

The little girl put out her arms, and in an instant was hoisted upon the strong man's shoulder. He set off with his burden to the Farm, while Jessie and Charlie followed rapidly behind.

Rachel was brimfull of pleasure and excitement, and entirely absorbed in the wish that her mother should see her in her exalted position; but she kept her determination to be silent until they were close

to the Manor Farm, when she could contain herself no longer, and exclaimed,—

"There's mamma, standing at the door with baby. I see her!"

"Aye, she has been expecting you for the last hour, miss. She could not hide her anxiety from us, though she took as much pains to teach us as if there had been nothing on her mind. I hope you won't stay out so late again, for it doesn't do your mother no good to be anxious."

By the time this little admonition had been delivered Rachel was safely landed on the door-step, where her mother stood ready to greet her returning children.

It was the same Margaret of former years, but yet not quite the same. Time and thought had given a deeper beauty to her whole countenance, and there was greater strength and tenderness shining forth out of the quiet peaceful blue eyes, and resting on the smiling mouth.

"There they be, both on 'em, ma'am, safe and sound," exclaimed the rough man, as Charlie was brought up in Jessie's arms.

"Thank you, William, for troubling yourself to go in search of them; they seem none the worse for their rainy walk home."

Jessie began to enter into explanations, but Margaret saw that the children were longing to pour the

history of all their pleasures into her ear, so she led them up-stairs, first wishing William a friendly "Good-night!"

He was standing aloof, watching the party with lively interest, and evidently waiting for a word from his mistress. He touched his cap in answer to her salutation, adding, "Good-night! and God bless you, ma'am!"

There was so much solemnity and earnestness in his voice and manner, that little Rachel whispered to her mother as she went up-stairs,

"Why did he say that, mamma?"

Jessie had caught the question, and replied;

"Because he feels your mamma has been the means of leading him to give up bad ways and turn to God; and," (addressing Margaret,) "indeed, ma'am, it is very different at home to what it used to be. William is not the same man he was. Aye, 'tis a happy home now to us all, and there's never a day passes but mother thanks God for sending you here to teach us poor people as you have done."

"Hush, Jessie! don't speak of me. Remember I am but an instrument in God's Hands, and if He is pleased to do good through me I praise Him for it, but it is no merit of my own."

And now the two little ones gathered round their mother with faces of eager delight, and told in baby language the story of their happiness. Rachel, as

having more words at her command, was chief speaker."

"Oh, mamma, we have been so happy! we have had such fun! If only you and papa had been with us, then I think we should have been still more happy! There was Aunt Rachel, and Uncle Winslade, and Dr. Dalton, and Gertie, and the boys, and several other children, and we had a magic lantern and a snapdragon; and then we had games, and Gertie chose them all, because it was her birthday; and then we had supper altogether in the dining-room, and" . . . .

"And such a number of good things, that when the children got home they could not even think of their father," said Philip's voice from behind.

"Oh, papa! papa! I wish you had been with us."

Little Rachel proceeded to seat him in a chair, and to take possession of one of his knees, whilst Charlie claimed his right to the other. "We were so happy! and may Gertie come to us to-morrow?"

"We will see about that when to-morrow comes," said their father; "but now let me hear all you have been doing; and then, Rachel, as Jessie is busy preparing our supper, and mamma looks tired, you may try and put yourself and Charlie to-bed for once."

This was received with an exclamation of delight from the little girl, and with chuckles of responding

glee from Charlie. It was a fresh pleasure for those, to whom life was as yet one continual pleasure.

When they had told their story, and had said "Good-night!" little Rachel stole up to her mother's side, and whispered in her ear, "Charlie and I can say our prayers alone to-night, dear mamma, if you are tired, so I hope you won't come and hear us?"

Margaret smiled, and kissed the soft rosy cheek which was pressed against her's.

"Very well, my child, you shall undress all by yourselves. I think I can trust you."

"You will come and kiss us in bed, mamma, won't you?" said Charlie.

Both the little ones stood eagerly waiting for an answer, while Rachel added, "But not if you are very tired, dear mamma."

"But if not," persisted Charlie, "then you will come."

Their mother nodded assent, and the little ones went off to bed.

As soon as Philip was left alone with his wife, he said, "Margaret, you look very pale and weary sometimes. I don't like to see it. I am certain you overtax your strength; but, thank God, you will have to do so no longer. Things are more prosperous with us now than they have been for years, and there is no reason why you should work as you

do. I am determined to put a stop to it, so I have asked Martha to come to us till we can hear of a servant likely to suit. Rachel, too, has entreated me to let her teach the children for a short time every day until you are stronger, and I really think it would be a capital plan that she should do so."

Margaret looked surprised.

"But perhaps Martha will not like to leave her cottage?"

"Oh, I have arranged it all, and she seemed quite delighted when I mentioned my plan."

"And you never consulted me!" said Margaret, with a smiling, half-reproachful face.

"Because my wife will never think of herself, and so her husband must think for her."

"But I could not let Rachel act governess to the children, now she is married, Philip. What would Mr. Winslade say?"

"Why, he was quite eager about the matter. I never knew him express so much unfeigned satisfaction in a plan before. It was evidently a great pleasure to him to think that Rachel should help you, and he declared that no one was so likely to teach our children well as his wife."

"I am sure I heartily agree with him in that, but really, Philip, it seems to me impossible. Think how much Rachel has already to do at home. What with teaching Gertie, and attending on Mr. Win-

slade, besides her other home duties, her whole time is fully taken up—it is indeed!"

"Well, as I said before, Maggie, we have settled it, and the children are to begin their lessons at The Elms next week;"—"at least if you don't object," he added after a pause.

"It is very kind of her, and of Mr. Winslade too! And what an immense advantage for little Rachel and Charlie! But indeed, Philip, I shall be quite idle; I shall have nothing to do—no lessons, no household work; why, you want to turn me into a fine lady!"

"Never, Maggie, and even if I wished to do so, I should not succeed; but you will have more time for me, and above all for *rest*, which is just what you need. I don't like to see you looking thin and pale. Dalton declares you are killing yourself by inches. He told me I was positively to forbid your visiting about among the cottages for the present, and he urged our going away from home for a few weeks."

"Oh, Philip!" Margaret exclaimed, "fancy the expense of such a thing. It would be quite wrong!"

"Not as matters stand. The worst of the struggle is over, and thanks to our landlord for not selling the Farm over our heads, and for letting me go on as tenant these several years past, we have tided over our difficulties; and now, Maggie," he said,

walking up and down the room with his hands in his pockets, "why, we are rolling in wealth! Do you call this nothing?" He drew out some pieces of gold, and tossed them from one hand to the other. "Really, I've more than I know what to do with!"

Margaret smiled at the deception.

"Seriously speaking, though, we have no cause to be anxious now, at all events. The farm has yielded uncommonly well so far this year, and the hops alone have brought me in sufficient to pay the rent. So then, Maggie, there is a large margin left for our little holiday."

"You are not in earnest, surely, Philip?" persisted Margaret.

"I never was more so. The fact is"—and he became grave, and spoke with some anxiety—"I have had a long talk with Dalton about you, and he declares you must go. He says that your health depends upon it; and, consequently, go we will, even should it cost me my last penny."

And they did go, leaving their three little children under the care of Rachel at The Elms. There was a double motive for Philip's journey, part of which he had kept from his wife, owing to her delicacy, and his consequent fear lest it might harass her. When once, however, they had started, he could not hide it any longer from her.

He had received a letter some little time before

from Mrs. Carter Smith, from Australia, saying that her husband was dead, and that she was returning to England, probably to Weston-super-Mare, where a sister lived, with whom she proposed to spend the rest of her life. It was a dreary letter, without much feeling, and without hope, and Philip wondered why it was written at all, since she neither asked for his sympathy or his help. Still he felt there must have been a latent desire on her part to see him, or why should she have written to him at all? Sufficient time had now elapsed since the receipt of her letter to make it probable that she had, ere this, reached England; and this determined him to take Margaret to Weston-super-Mare, so that, if possible, he might be of some use to Mrs. Carter Smith.

The day after reaching the place, they both set out in search of Miss Needham's house, and after some inquiry they found it. It was situated in a small back street, and had a dull, cheerless aspect. The door was opened by a small, pale-faced girl, who looked very much as if she never washed, or slept, or undressed.

On hearing Philip's inquiry, she informed him "that Miss Needham was not at home, but that her sister was."

Philip asked the name of the sister.

"Mrs. Smith," she said.

They went up-stairs, and were ushered into a little parlour, which looked almost as poverty-stricken as the maid. Here they sat down, waiting with some anxiety for the entrance of Mrs. Carter Smith.

She came at last; a thin, wrinkled, worn-looking woman. Could it be Matilda Smith? Could a few short years have made such a wreck—such a change? Margaret's heart melted within her, and she had great difficulty in keeping back her tears. Philip almost shuddered as he took her thin, cold hand, and said, kindly,

"How do you do, Matilda?"

"Oh, tolerably well, I thank you. We had a bad passage, and I have hardly recovered from its effects. . . . You think me a good deal altered, I can see."

"I am sure," said Margaret, "you have gone through much sorrow since we last saw you."

"I have, indeed."

Her manner was subdued, and, at the same time, cold and distant.

Philip felt puzzled and perplexed. "I called upon you," he said, "to ask if I could in any way be of use to you."

"I thank you very much. I believe not. This is in future to be my home," she said, glancing round the forlorn little sitting-room; "and you will do me a great favour by not mentioning my return at Ellaston. It might lead to troubles. I am not in

a position to pay Carter's debts, although I have enough to keep me from absolute want."

She bent down her head over her lap, and her voice trembled.

"You may be quite sure, Matilda," said Philip, "that I would never hurt you by word or deed; and your arrival in England shall assuredly not be mentioned by me in any quarter where it can injure you."

"You would never hurt by word or deed the wife of the man who almost ruined you, while she herself insulted, abused, and despised you?"

Mrs. Carter Smith spoke these words slowly, and almost sententiously, and then added, while her voice broke into a half sob, "Oh, Philip, you and your wife are heaping coals of fire upon my head. If you were to treat me scornfully and spitefully, I could bear it more easily than this, indeed I could;" and she buried her face in her lap.

Margaret was touched to the very heart, and she spoke to Mrs. Carter Smith in kind, soothing words.

For some time after there was silence; at last Philip said,—

"I hope, Matilda, you will allow me, as your nearest male relative, to look into your affairs, and help you in your present difficulties. The past is long forgotten; and I can honestly say that my wife and

I shall be heartily thankful if we can in any way be of use to you."

"No, don't;" and she waved her hand, as if to drive them from her; "it is quite enough; it is more than I can endure; . . . but you have made me believe to-day that Christianity is a real thing, if it can enable a man to forgive his worst enemy—yes, his worst enemy, and treat her with kindness and pity. You could not have given me a greater proof of the strength and power of the religion which I once thought hypocrisy. How *can* you forgive me?"

"Recollect, Matilda, how much our Father in heaven has to forgive in us daily and hourly; and surely it makes any forgiveness between man and man seem small indeed. If you have ever wronged us, the greater wrong was against God; and I do so wish that in these dark, sad days, you should find that which alone can comfort you—pardon of sin through the Cross of our blessed Saviour."

There was great earnestness in Philip's whole manner and look, and Mrs. Carter Smith trembled under its intensity.

"It is too late now to seek for what I have all my life rejected," she said, drearily.

"Too late!" exclaimed Philip. "Never. Listen to the words of the Lord Jesus, 'Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.'"

"You can hardly be aware with what bitter aversion I have, throughout my life, opposed religion. I think if you knew me well, you would not dare to make use of those words as suitable to my case."

"Blessed be God!" exclaimed Margaret; "the love of Christ and His power to save are not limited. 'Ho, *every one* that thirsteth, Come ye to the waters.' There is exclusion for none, there is salvation offered to all."

"But if I do not thirst?"

"You *are* thirsting for peace, for comfort, and for joy," said Philip. "You have been casting about on all sides of you through life to find these, and I am certain that hitherto you have been grievously disappointed. Believe me, they are not to be obtained from earth or earthly things. They are the gift of God. You know not how you can come to God? You dare not approach Him as you are? But it was the lost Christ came to save, and sinners whom He addressed in words of love and tenderness, entreating them to come unto Him. You say in your heart you cannot come, you know not how. Act, I pray you, like the man with the withered hand, who obeyed without questioning his Lord's command, and with the attempt the power came. So may God's Spirit lead you, without money and without price, to your Redeemer, that you may claim your share of the living water!"

Mrs. Carter Smith sat motionless, her head bent down over her lap; but the Spirit of God moved upon the face of those troubled waters.

* * * * *

"There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Oh, happy house! where Thou art loved the best,
Dear Friend and Saviour of our race,
Where never comes such welcom'd, honour'd guest,
Where none can ever fill Thy place;
Where every heart goes forth to meet Thee,
Where every ear attends Thy word,
Where every lip with blessing greets Thee,
Where all are waiting on their Lord.

"Oh, happy house! where two are one in heart,
In holy faith and hope are one.
Whom death can only for a little part,
Not end the union here begun;
Who share together one salvation,
Who would be with Thee, Lord, always,
In gladness or in tribulation,
In happy or in evil days.

"Oh, happy house! whose little ones are given
Early to Thee, in faith and prayer,—
To Thee, their Friend, Who, from the heights of heaven,
Guards them with more than mother's care.
Oh, happy house! where little voices
Their glad hosannahs love to raise,
And childhood's lisping tongue rejoices
To bring new songs of love and praise."

CHAPTER XVIII.

When Philip and Margaret returned, a pretty and picturesque group were standing by the gateway and on the lawn of the Manor Farm to receive them. Caleb had been hidden behind the garden hedge, ostensibly occupied in planting cabbages, but in reality attentively listening for carriage wheels. At the proper time he darted out to open the gate, then, having deputed the garden lad to take charge of Mr. Warner's gig, he began walking backwards and forwards in a restless, uncertain manner, close by his master and mistress, who were engrossed with their children and the Winslades.

Suddenly Philip turned round and exclaimed,—

"Well, Caleb, and how are you? and how is Martha?"

"There's my missus at the door, Sir, to answer for herself, and I'm well enough, as times go. I get a bit cripply to what I used, but there ain't much to complain of, and if there were, 'tis best to hold your tongue about it; least said soonest mended."

"You are right; a thankful heart is a happy heart, and grumbling helps nothing."

"As to the farm, Sir, why, we 've had our ups and downs like the rest of the world; but then 'tis a'most impossible for everything to answer to the bit. I made sure I should have lost one of our young pigs; 'twas Tuesday in last week, as it might be, in the afternoon, when he went off his feed, and—"

Philip made a move towards the farm-yard.

"'Tis all right now, Sir, there 's no fear of him; but people say as there 's a deal of sickness amongst the pigs round about; and Bill 's but just been a-telling me as Farmer Rudge has got the disease among his cows; that 's a bad job, Sir, for them sort of things spreads; and the red cow here, she was ill for a week. I had two thoughts whether we could make a cure of her; but 'twas wonderful—"

"I am going round the farm myself, Caleb. Winslade! are you up to a walk—a short one, just about the place?"

Caleb interposed—

"Please, Sir, I 've something very particular to say to you and the Missus afore you goes round. You see, Sir, your labouring men and the lads, and one or two more of the Oakswood fellows, why, they took into their heads — 'twas William Dobson as first put them up to it—" here Caleb paused, and

looked much confused; "I wasn't to say nothing to you on the matter,—but they wants to see you, and there's a many of them out in the yard; they've been full of it these weeks back. 'Tis a present as we've got;—but I gave my word I'd say nothing about it, so you see I can't, Sir."

Philip looked astonished. He went up to Margaret, and said:

"This is a most extraordinary thing; it must be," he added, in a low tone, "in Caleb's imagination; but we had better go and see."

The farmer and his wife, with the rest of the party, followed Caleb round the house towards the farm-yard, and at each step they could hear more distinctly sounds of talking and laughing. Men were exhorting boys to behave and be quiet, and boys were rioting, after the manner of their race. It was the old story of "boys will be boys," aud it is much to be doubted whether any amount of instruction in Sunday and night-schools will knock off the edges of that rough development of mankind, a "carter lad." The teaching and the influence may, and, with God's blessing will, soften his heart, and set his mind in tune; but it will hardly destroy within him his strong animal vitality; and, in the opinion of most people, such a result would be undesirable.

When Philip and Margaret appeared in the farm-yard, there was instantaneous order, and the roughest

spirits were quieted down; yet a painful awkwardness seemed to have crept over them. They touched their caps, and looked pleased enough; but the men appeared as if their hands and legs were so much in their way that they did not know where to put them, and the lads either nervously pushed each other, or quietly kicked against the barn doors.

William Dobson went up to Caleb, and gave him a roll of paper, and then Caleb went up to Philip, and said,—

"Please Sir, this 'ere paper has got our names upon it,—and the beginning part of it speaks about you and your good lady. I ai'nt much of a scholard, and I never could make out handwriting—so there! perhaps you'll read it yourself, Sir."

The men had gathered close round Caleb as he spoke, but they none of them seemed to have courage to offer their services. This was rather awkward; for Philip perceived at a glance the purport of the address, and to read it himself would have placed him in an uncomfortable position.

Mr. Winslade saw his difficulty, took the paper from his hand, and, in a firm, strong voice, he read as follows:—

"'We, the undersigned men and lads on Mr. Warner's farm, and from Oakswood, wish to thank him and his wife for all their kindness in teaching us, and

trying to do us good for these several years. And we hope that Mr. and Mrs. Warner will accept from us a copy of the Holy Bible, which we have clubbed together to buy, as a mark of our gratitude and affection. We pray God to bless them and their children with His Holy Spirit; to give them long life and prosperity; and, finally, to bring them to His Everlasting Kingdom.'"

"Aye, that we do!" said old Caleb, at the conclusion, as he rubbed the sleeve of his coat across his eyes.

And one of the men by his side muttered, so low that nobody could hear him,—

"I prays for that every day of my life."

A physiognomist might have watched the group with keen interest.

Upon each face there was a varying degree of gratitude and kindliness breaking through the usual dull, impassive expression, and lighting up the countenances into real animation. Philip and Margaret could see it easily; for they knew their labourers well, after years of patient forbearance on their part, and, in some cases, of revolt, ingratitude, or even misconduct, on the part of the men and lads. They had an individual acquaintance with each, and could read with thankfulness the expression which on this day was prominent on their dark, unshorn faces.

Jessie brought out the Bible, which the men had sent into the house. It was large and handsome, with maps and references.

Philip took it in silence, for he was a good deal moved; then, turning to Margaret, he placed the Bible in her hands—

"It is for you, Maggie, not for me."

"'Tis for both," said voices here and there.

"My good fellows, I am sure my wife and I thank you heartily for this token of your kind feeling towards us, but she has a better right to your gratitude than I have; you owe her far more than you owe me; she has cared for you, thought of you, aye, and prayed for you these years past; and, although she will set a high value on your present, both for your sakes, and also because it is the Book she loves best in the world, yet I know what she would value still more, and that is, to see you all giving up your hearts to God."

Philip's words were received with attentive silence; some amongst the men and one or two amongst the boys looked up—they were those of whom Margaret had great hope, and their consciences answered that this was their chief desire. They had left off using bad language and frequenting the public-house; they were trying hard to control their tempers, and to do their work with diligence. Thus much was apparent to all their companions; but the outer

change had begun deeper down, and in one or two cases real spiritual life had sprung up, and there were evidences of heart religion. In others there was the smoking flax; and the remainder, who were now looking down, or carelessly staring about them, had not as yet come under the gracious influences which were offered so earnestly for their acceptance.

After a pause, Philip said,

"We thank you sincerely, and I can say most truly I have never felt happier in my life than I do at this moment. It has been our wish to make you look on us not only as a master and mistress, but as your best friends; and this"—he pointed to the Bible—"is, I believe, a sign that we have in some measure succeeded—that you *trust* us."

"Aye, and love you too," grumbled out the head shepherd.

"I hope, also, it means that you hold that Book to be the most costly thing a man can possess."

Then he added, as he saw them moving to go, "By the bye, I want to thank you, my men, and the lads too, for the way in which you have worked for me. It is no small satisfaction when I find you are trying to do your duty by me, and working honestly and diligently whether my eye is on you or no. I often say, 'There's no farmer in Herefordshire that has got such labouring men as I have.'"

"'Tis the old story," said Caleb, "a good master

makes good servants. If you treats us well, we pays you back in the same coin; but if you took to flinging hard words at us, as Farmer Rudge do to his men, and kept back part of our wages till it suited your convenience to pay 'em, . . . why, 'tis no doubt we shouldn't be what we are."

"Sure, and he's right!" exclaimed several; and Caleb was fired with a desire to go on.

"Let a master rule his men not with kicks but kindness, says I; . . . that's Martha's plan. 'Twas her as taught me that lesson, for she's been a ruling of me that way through life;—leastways ever since she took to be my missus, and I always knocks under. 'T ai'nt in the nature of a man to fight against them as treats him well." There was a good deal of laughter throughout the yard, and Caleb's voice was drowned while it lasted. He looked slightly offended, for he had spoken in grave earnest.

"'There's many a true word spoken in jest,' anyhow, Master Wilks," said the old shepherd, in order to soothe down his ruffled feelings; and this sentiment was cordially echoed by the rest.

"Our master is a good 'un, there's no denying that," said William Dobson.

"And our missus, too," added Caleb.

This was also cordially responded to, and then the whole party separated, with the mutual goodwill

between masters and servants more closely and firmly cemented.

The Winslades had been interested spectators of the whole scene, and when they were again alone with Philip and his wife, Rachel warmly pressed her sister's hand, and said, "Surely this is a proof that your labours among them have not been thrown away!"

"It is not enough to love us, they must love God," answered Margaret in a low voice.

Mr. Winslade exclaimed,

"Well, I never thought you and your wife would have drawn such an expression of feeling out of such materials as these rough ignorant fellows, but I believe the law of kindness—of Christian kindness—is irresistible. I hope we have begun to try it at The Elms. Rachel certainly has."

"Paul may plant and Apollos water, but God alone can give the increase," said Margaret, as if speaking in answer to her own thoughts.

"I believe it is your faith and trust which has prospered all your efforts," remarked Mr. Winslade.

"And prayer," added Philip; "she has had many discouragements, and I have often doubted whether the return was worth the labour. Had it not been for Margaret I should never have tried my hand at getting a hold over the men and lads about us; much less should I have had the perseverance to

carry on such an uphill work as it has been; but I am certain that 'he who serves God serves a good master,' however imperfectly the service may be rendered or succeed."

"He looks at the motive rather than the amount done," said Margaret; "and if we work in His strength, He will prosper our efforts."

Mr. Winslade had for some moments been resting on his crutches, gazing around on the cheerful Farmhouse, with its well-kept garden and farmyard, and then finally at the farmer himself, his wife and little ones; and then he said,—

"We had a capital sermon from Mr. Willoughby last Sunday on this text, 'Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come;' and it strikes me, Warner, that you and your wife are an exemplification of that verse."

Margaret exclaimed eagerly,

"Thank God for all His infinite goodness to us! but I do not think earthly comforts and riches are in the least degree meant by the 'promise of the life which now is';" for I know so many faithful followers of our blessed Lord who to the outward eye have nothing pleasant of this life, and yet who are enjoying greater happiness and peace in the midst of sorrow and suffering than any ungodly person can in the full swing of health and wealth. I have

heard Mr. Willoughby warn us against supposing that the godly will necessarily have outward prosperity, but he has often said that they would always have a wellspring of joy within, which would carry them lightly over the waves of this troublesome world; and that, where a worldly man might sink under the weight of care and trouble, a Christian man would by it be brought nearer to his God, and find by blessed experience that to him the darkest cloud has a silver lining."

"You are right, he made use of some such words as those in his sermon. One day they will, I trust, be a greater reality to me than they are now."

. . . . . .

When the evening came, and Margaret had laid down her little ones each in their soft crib, she returned after a while quietly and stealthily into the room in order to take another look at them.

They were fast asleep. Little Rachel's bright curly hair was streaming over the white pillow, and clasped tightly in her arms was the doll which her mother had brought home for her; a strange contrast it was, with its staring beadlike eyes, to the lovely little face so full of rest and calm, and yet so expressive and earnest even in sleep!

Charlie had almost kicked off the coverlid which had been carefully tucked about him; one round dimpled arm was flung over his head, a fat little

foot peered out at one side, a small knee made a hillock in the centre of the crib, while the sweet laughing mouth was half parted, as if by pleasant thoughts. There he lay, stretched out in the very perfection of childish health and beauty.

The baby in her basinette was almost hidden from sight, and nothing could be seen of her beyond the round bare little head, lying placidly in the very place where Margaret had laid her.

The mother stood for a long time gazing at them, feasting her eyes on their loveliness; then she pressed a fervent kiss on each sweet unconscious face, and then she knelt down.

Had she not a call both to praise and prayer? To praise; for had not the Lord God poured out such fulness of lovingkindness upon her? To prayer; for was she not, and were not her beloved ones, still in the land of their pilgrimage, surrounded by dangers and temptations?

And did she not long for the day when they should all, not one missing, be lost in the ocean of love and peace, about which she had once dreamed, and be 'at rest for ever on their Saviour's breast'!

. . . . . .

The blinds were drawn down when she entered the small sitting-room, the candles were alight, the fire burnt and crackled cheerfully in the hearth, and Philip was seated in his usual place by the side of it.

But Margaret was evidently buried in thought that night, for she once more stood as she had done in the nursery—silent, reflective, but intensely happy!

Philip observed her for some minutes, and then he said,

"What are you thinking about, Maggie?"

"I am thinking that our cup of happiness is quite full, even to overflowing!"

CHAPTER XIX.

"A little longer, trembling heart,
Let earth and earthly joys depart;
A few more days revolving slow,
Let a few twilights come and go,
Till life's appointed course is run,
And grace its mighty work has done;
Then, O my Saviour! let me be
At Home in Heaven, at Home with Thee!"

—"*The Name of Jesus,*" *and other Poems.*

CHAPTER XIX.

MANY summers came and went. Autumn leaves spread year by year their rich, dark carpeting over the earth, and then disappeared to do their hidden work of renewing and strengthening.

Winter followed slowly and certainly, and laid its cold, icy hand on meadow, stream, and cottage. The earth submitted passively, and lay calm and inactive, gathering up vitality to burst forth in the spring-time into grace, beauty, and loveliness. And times and seasons ran their course quietly, noiselessly, without deviation; but for all that, great changes were gradually taking place, although men marked them not; for what, upon the face of this earth, remains from day to day the same? Man's life is a type of all material existence. He is born into the world; he gains strength; he blooms forth in power and vigour; he attains perfection; and then, as gradually and imperceptibly, he decays—he fades, and drops down at last; the grave closes over him, and the gap he has made is rapidly filled up by the fresh

tide of living souls, who are ever pressing onwards from their cradle to their grave. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it; surely the people is grass."

Such is the law of our present state, and such its outer aspect. But its strongly-marked features, so full of suggestion and warning, are meant to teach us a great truth—a truth God has written upon the face of nature, so that those who run may read.

Is it not that men's inner life is changing as surely and certainly as their bodies? By nature the change is a dark and dreary one. They are getting day by day further from God, and nearer to the eternity of banishment from His light and love. But, blessed be His Holy Name, and blessed be His love in Christ, the daily change may be of another sort. It may be from darkness to light—from the twilight of that first cry, "What must I do to be saved?" into the glorious sunshine of God's favour. Oh, what a daily change from lesser to greater, and still greater joy, peace, and hope! As step by step the worldly man recedes from God and heaven, in like manner the Christian man advances towards Him. To-day he is a little further than yesterday—to-morrow a little further than to-day; he may not realize it, but so it is. For he cannot stand still; it is against the law both of nature and of grace.

As elsewhere, so at the Manor Farm and The Elms, this law of change had imperceptibly been working.

Neither outwardly nor inwardly were these homes the same as heretofore.

The rooks still built their great rough nests at spring-time in the tall elm-trees, and cawed incessantly around the gabled farmhouse. The rich meadow land was still spread out like a green carpet between the two farms. The outline of the Malvern hills rose up in the background, and the evening sun lit up their smooth velvet sides with a radiant glory, as it had done in fair weather ever since the memory of man.

Margaret's little garden was trim and neat, just as she loved to see it; and the borders were gay with crocuses and snowdrops. The picturesque old farmhouse seemed to bid defiance to the ravages of time; the door and window-sills were freshly painted; the lawn was free from leaves, and the short drive without a weed upon it. It all looked as pleasant to the eye as in the days when Philip Warner first brought his young wife to live there, and to be its crowning beauty.

Philip himself had just ridden up to the door and given his horse to Caleb (a feeble, weak old man now). The farmer had lost all the elasticity of his early manhood, and his hair was almost white.

There were deep furrows cut in his fine, open forehead, and lines of sorrow in his face; but in the midst of it there was a wonderfully gentle, peaceful expression in his eyes, lighting up his countenance, and making it strangely attractive.

He mounted the stone steps slowly; but before he had reached the top, the door opened, and a girlish voice exclaimed,—

"Oh, father, I have been watching for you such a long time! We all walked down towards Ellaston with Gertie, who spent the day here, in hopes of meeting you, and came back by The Elms, because we thought you might go round that way to see uncle Winslade and aunt Rachel."

Philip had only time to bend down and kiss the speaker—a slight, fair-haired girl, with soft, tender eyes, like Margaret's,—when several other children of various ages came running out, each struggling for the expected greeting; each trying to get hold of a hand, or, in default of that, of a bit of coat. It was a very harmonious rivalry; but Rachel, the elder sister, saw the weary look on her father's face, and whispered something to the excited little ones. They were instantly calmed. The whole group went into the house, and the door closed.

And where was Margaret?

She had reached the goal of all her hopes and longings. She had fought the fight—she had

finished her course—she was safe in her Saviour's bosom for ever, waiting in perfect blessedness until her loved ones on earth should, in God's own good time, be gathered with her into the heavenly garner.

Her constant prayers while on earth were being answered; not in one solitary instance, but in many.

The sweet memory of her deeds of love were treasured in all hearts at Oakswood. Many rose up and called her blessed, and said it was through her they had first known and loved their Saviour. Her name was a household word in those lowly cottages, spoken gently and tenderly, with faltering voice and tearful eye.

But in the Manor Farm—her own bright home, where for so many years she had lived in peace and joy, with the little ones springing up around her, her husband a useful, prosperous man, and her sister settled happily close by her,—ah! there was the deepest blank—the most complete desolation! And for a time Philip's heart was crushed and sick of life.

Margaret was not; and he refused to be comforted. He thought his children were too young to suffer with him; and the very sight of them—the very thought of what they had lost—increased his anguish during those weeks of desolation.

His eldest child, Rachel, grew suddenly into a woman. Her aunt Rachel's advice and support was of untold value to her at this time, and it led her to subdue her own bitter grief,—to strive and be a mother to the little ones, and to do exactly as her own beloved mother used to do. She managed to gain a quiet influence over her brothers and sisters, and to keep up the habits of perfect obedience and kindliness in which their mother had trained them. She watched her father's every look, anticipated his slightest want, and taught the others to do so also.

It needed but a word to make them one and all unite in showing their clinging, childish love, by the most devoted attention; and this touching sympathy from his children at last awakened in Philip an interest in life again.

He was soothed and thankful. He recognised in their love the love of his Heavenly Father, who, in the midst of judgment, had remembered mercy.

When his work was over, and evening came, he sat in his usual seat by the fire-side, watching with keen interest the little party grouped around,—each pleasantly occupied, each acting kindly and gently to the other; and if any one wanted the work to be set right, the pencil to be cut, the story to be read, it was to Rachel to whom they turned at once.

Peace and harmony reigned in the farmer's home,

for Margaret's influence had, by God's blessing, done its work in all.

Rachel was her father's mainstay. There was the same sweet face and fair hair; the same quiet, graceful manner; the same thoughtful love, in which he had so long delighted, and which had been the sunshine of his life. The very sight of her brought back memories of bygone days,—of years full of happiness and holiness, when the desire of his eyes walked beside him, and they journeyed heavenwards together.

One evening the likeness struck him more forcibly than it had ever done.

He closed his eyes, and recalled Margaret as she was in her girlish days, all radiant in beauty; and latterly, when her hair had become tinged with white, and her sweet face had grown thin and pale.

To him she was loveliest then.

Philip's hand was pressed over his eyes at the remembrance. Burning tears of bitter human sorrow trickled down, and he muttered, submissively, "Thy will be done!"

He felt an arm passed round his neck, and a soft head laid upon his shoulder. A thrill passed through him—it was so like Margaret's touch.

"Did I startle you, father?"

"No, my child."

He drew her closer to him, and said, in a broken voice,—

"You are very like your mother. Thank God for it!"

"Oh, tears, keep back! you shall not swell,
'Twas God who took her—all is well.
A little longer, I shall feel
That arm once more around me steal,
And hold me in a long embrace,
Where sin and sorrow have no place:
There, God who gave her to be mine
Shall fill us full of life Divine;
And of His pleasures, from their river,
Our souls shall drink—and drink for ever."

THE END.

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